

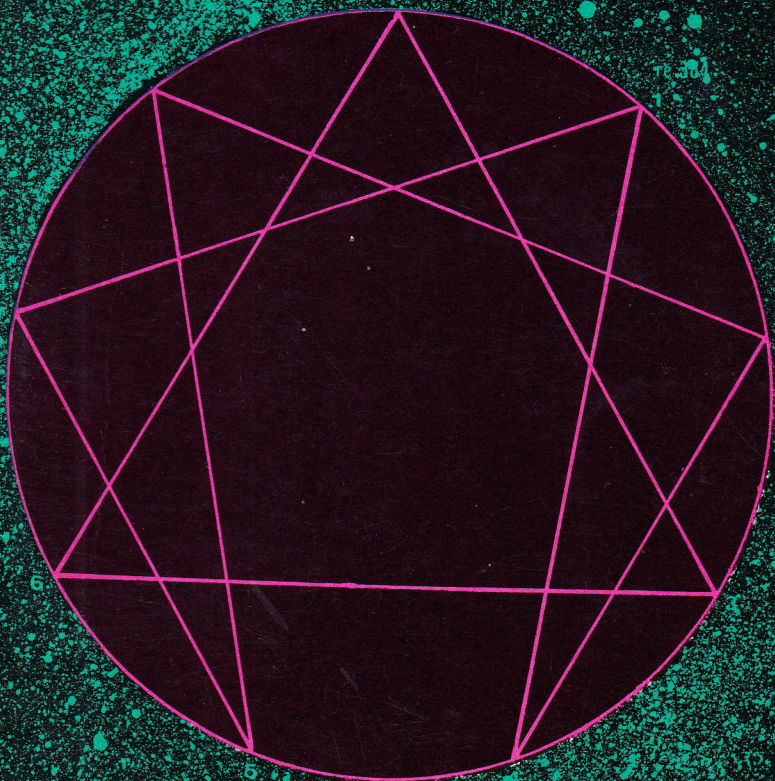
KENNETH WALKER

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JONATHAN  
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# A Study of Gurdjieff's Teaching





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A STUDY OF GURDJIEFF'S TEACHING

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KENNETH WALKER

A Study of  
Gurdjieff's Teaching

JONATHAN CAPE  
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE LONDON



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*I dedicate this book to those members of Gurdjieff's  
Paris Group who have given such valuable assistance to  
Gurdjieff's followers in this country*

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## PREFACE

IN a criticism of a recent work of mine, Mr. Cyril Connolly remarked that for the last ten years I had been trying to write the same book with varying success. He was right, for almost every word I have written since the publication of *Diagnosis of Man* in 1942 has reflected one or another aspect of Gurdjieff's teaching, a teaching which forms a complete, consistent and integrated whole. And now all of these previous efforts are culminating in an attempt to give a fuller account of the psycho-philosophical system which has imparted to my books the sameness of which Mr. Connolly complains. I therefore regard this present work as being much more important than any of its predecessors, whatever its fate may be and however unfavourable the criticisms that it receives. That it will be handled very roughly by some of my critics is highly probable, for no one has ever greeted Gurdjieff's teaching with indifference. He has either felt that there was something big in it or else has reacted very violently against it, for, like other religious teachers — I regard Gurdjieff as such — he startled his hearers rather than soothed them.

The account of Gurdjieff's teaching contained in this book is very far from being complete. It was not my intention to give a full report of it, but to comment on those parts of his system of knowledge which have made a particularly deep impression on me or which I have felt to be of special importance.

I have many acknowledgements to make, and there is no person to whom I am so deeply indebted as to Gurdjieff's chief interpreter, P. D. Ouspensky. Had it not been for his

clear exposition — both in his talks and in his posthumous work *In Search of the Miraculous* — this small book on Gurdjieff's teaching could never have been written. I should also like to acknowledge the help I have received from the works of my lifelong friend, Dr. Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, *The New Man* and *The Mark*. I need scarcely add that I have also obtained valuable information from Gurdjieff's own book, *All and Everything*. The whole of his teaching can be found in this great work of his, provided that one has the diligence, the knowledge and the understanding necessary for discovering it there. If this small book of mine is the means by which a reader is able to equip himself with the knowledge required for this task, it will have served one of the purposes for which it was written. In comparing Gurdjieff's teaching with other Eastern doctrines, and more particularly with those of the Vedanta, I have had great help from Sri Aurobindo's important books, *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

Finally, my warmest thanks of all are reserved for the members of Gurdjieff's Paris group, who have done so much to assist the study of his methods both here in England and in America. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

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## A STUDY OF GURDJIEFF'S TEACHING

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## CHAPTER I

### GURDJIEFF AND OUSPENSKY

It is fascinating, and at the same time rather alarming, to look back along the line of the past and to note how thin was the thread which the Fates spun and how easily it could have been broken — and if it had been broken, then one's life would, of course, have been quite different. How little I guessed that when a young Russian journalist on the night staff of a St. Petersburg newspaper made a journey to Moscow in the spring of 1915 he was initiating a sequence of events which was eventually to be of the utmost importance to me also. 'What,' I should have protested, had a clairvoyant gipsy drawn my attention to this — 'what on earth have a St. Petersburg journalist's movements got to do with me, the resident surgeon to the British Hospital in Buenos Aires?' There seemed to be no connection at all between myself and any events occurring in Russia, and many things had to happen and many years had to flow past before the path of the stocky young Russian journalist with the cropped hair and the strong glasses crossed that of the Buenos Aires surgeon.

Ouspensky tells us in his book, *In Search of the Miraculous*, that during this said visit of his to Moscow in the spring of 1915 two friends, a sculptor and a musician, spoke of a small group in Moscow which was engaged in certain investigations and experiments which were difficult to describe. They worked under the direction of a Caucasian Greek and, rather against his will, he agreed to be introduced to their Caucasian teacher. The meeting took place at a small café, and Ouspensky gives the following description of his first



encounter with Gurdjieff — 'I saw a man of an Oriental type, no longer young, with a black moustache and piercing eyes, who astonished me first of all because he seemed to be disguised and completely out of keeping with the place and its atmosphere. I was still full of impressions of the East. And this man with the face of an Indian raja or an Arab sheik . . . seated here in this little café . . . in a black overcoat and a velvet collar and a black bowler hat produced this strange, unexpected and almost alarming impression of a man poorly disguised, the sight of whom embarrasses you because you see he is not what he pretends to be and yet you have to speak and behave as though you did not see it.' (P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*.)

They met together several times at the same café, and Ouspensky began to realize more and more that the man to whom he was talking here in Moscow, this man who spoke incorrect Russian with a strong Caucasian accent, was possessed of the kind of knowledge for which he, Ouspensky, had recently been seeking without success in India and Ceylon. It was the beginning of a seven years close association between the two men of great importance to them both.

Then came the War and the Revolution, which brought to an end not only the old Czarist régime but also all thought and culture in Russia. In 1917 Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, with several other members of Gurdjieff's group, were refugees in Constantinople, but they were as far from being any concern of the writer of this book as they had always been. Then the thin thread of events began to draw them nearer to me. There were influential people in England who had read Ouspensky's book, *Tertium Organum*, and who, on hearing that its author was one of the many Russian refugees stranded in Constantinople, invited him to come to London.

The next significant event took place right on my doorstep at 86, Harley Street. 'We have been granted an interview with the Home Secretary in twenty minutes' time and I want you to be a member of the deputation.' It was my friend

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Dr. Maurice Nicoll who said this and, without giving me time to answer him, he bundled me into a waiting taxi.

'But what's it all about?' I inquired, after having been introduced to the other members of the deputation.

'About Gurdjieff. We have to get a permit for him to come to London. Ouspensky is already here, and we want Gurdjieff as well. You are to represent orthodox medicine and to say how important it is that Gurdjieff should be allowed to come here.'

Half an hour later I found myself explaining to a bored Home Secretary how essential it was to the welfare of British Medicine that Gurdjieff (who was only a name to me) should be granted permission to settle in London. But the Home Office explained next day that it had already granted so many permits to White Russian officers that it was unable to issue one to Gurdjieff.

So Ouspensky settled down in London and began holding meetings there, whilst Gurdjieff remained where he was in Paris, and eventually established in a Fontainebleau château what had for so long been only a project in his mind, the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man.

Maurice Nicoll was responsible for the forging of the last link in the long chain of events which had started, eight years previously, with Ouspensky's fateful expedition to Moscow and his meeting with Gurdjieff. He buttonholed me one day at the corner of Weymouth Street and Harley Street and told me that Ouspensky was now holding very interesting meetings in Kensington and that he had obtained permission for me to attend. He explained that it was by private invitation only that people were allowed to come, and left me with the impression that I could consider myself very fortunate to have received an invitation. 'Wednesday next at eight o'clock in Warwick Gardens,' he concluded, and disappeared.

I have told the story of my meeting Ouspensky, of my close association with him for over thirty years and of my subsequent encounters in Paris with that still more remarkable

man George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff in a previous book. All of these events, of great concern to me and of sufficient general interest to warrant their being put on record, were recounted in *Venture with Ideas*, but little was said in that book about the ideas taught by these two men, and it was the unique quality of their teaching even more than their characters which bound me to them for so many years. Ideas are not always passive, submissive things which we can lay aside when we have no further use for them, and this was particularly true of the ideas which I obtained either from Gurdjieff directly or else by way of Ouspensky. They were ideas heavily charged with energy and they soon began to work in me like some powerful ferment. Attracted to them originally on the grounds that they were unlike anything that I had previously come across, they gradually took possession of me and propelled me in a direction in which at first I had no desire to go. Unlike Ouspensky, who had deliberately abandoned his work in 1914 in order to search in the East for what he called 'Esoteric schools', I was, or believed myself to be, content with things as they were. In short, I had no need for a philosophy of life. Yet here was I being jerked out of my usual rut of living and my customary channels of thought and feeling, not so much by the impact of two powerful men — remarkable though they both were — but by the sheer weight of their teaching. All these things are explained in *Venture with Ideas*.

Gurdjieff was in Paris and Ouspensky in London, so it was from the latter that I learnt the system of knowledge which Gurdjieff had brought back to Russia from his years of wandering in the East. And it was perhaps as well that the Fates who were responsible for all that was now happening to me arranged it thus. Gurdjieff used strong medicine, and I doubt whether I should have stomached his very drastic treatment had I met him at the beginning. I owe a great deal to Ouspensky for all he did for me during those earlier years, and I am deeply grateful to him for his patient and clear-

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headed interpretation of Gurdjieff's teaching. He had a much better command of English than had Gurdjieff and a methodical and tidy mind which imposed order on the latter's less systematized method of teaching. His patience was remarkable. From 1917 onwards he sought clearer and yet clearer formulations for the ideas he had received from Gurdjieff, with the intention, possibly — for he never spoke with certainty about this — of publishing them in the form of a book after the latter's death. But he died before his teacher, and it was upon Gurdjieff that the responsibility then lay of deciding whether or not Ouspensky's much-revised typescript should be sent to a publisher. Gurdjieff had a Russian rendering of it read to him, declared it to be an accurate account of his own teaching and gave instructions that it should be published forthwith.

Gurdjieff and Ouspensky are now dead and, if I am ever to put on printed record what I learnt from them, it must be now. I have hesitated for a very long time before embarking on this task, and for a great many reasons. An important one was that I was well aware of the difficulty of putting into a book a teaching so individual as that of Gurdjieff, a teaching which, to be effective, cannot be read, but must be imparted to individuals by word of mouth. Gurdjieff believed that men and women are divisible into a comparatively small number of types, and that what is applicable to one type is not necessarily applicable to another. This being so, instruction has to be given individually, and it is obvious that this cannot be done in a book. I also foresaw the difficulty of presenting ideas, first in the raw as I received them from Ouspensky, and of then showing the gradual deepening of my understanding of them as the years passed. This slow growth of understanding could only be suggested in a book by telescoping time, and the result of this might be confusing, so that the reader would often be left in doubt whether I was describing ideas as I had first received them from Ouspensky,

or as I understood them much later on. This method of presentation might also require that I should sometimes have to put into Ouspensky's mouth words which he had never uttered, even although they were completely in keeping with his teaching. All this made it clear to me that I should encounter many difficulties in writing about Gurdjieff's ideas.

Gurdjieff once said: 'I have very good leather to sell to those who want to make shoes out of it', and when these words came into my mind they immediately gave me the right plan for the book. No better description than this could be given of Gurdjieff's role as a teacher. He was a man who had ideas of an extraordinarily high quality to sell to those who required ideas of this kind. Moreover, he had used the word 'sell' deliberately because he always maintained that men never appreciated anything which they had not paid for; the payment need not necessarily be in terms of money, but something had to have been sacrificed if the leather they had acquired was to be properly appreciated. Another important point he made in this short sentence of his was that the leather was for those who intended to put it to a practical use and not for dilettantes or exhibitionists who required it merely for display. The buyer would have to make something out of the leather he had bought, and nothing could be more serviceable than a strong pair of shoes for life's difficult journey. I saw that the aim I should have to keep in view whilst writing the projected book was that of showing the reader the excellence of Gurdjieff's leather, and of then displaying the shoes I had made out of it. The workmanship and design of my new shoes could, of course, have been much better, but they have this at any rate to be said in their favour, that they are handmade and my own work.

As will later be seen, having given an account of Gurdjieff's ideas, I often compare them with kindred ideas obtained from scientific, philosophical and religious sources. These comparisons have been made because it has long been

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of great interest to me personally to compare and to contrast Gurdjieff's ideas with those I have come across in a somewhat varied reading during the course of the past thirty years. Many striking similarities have been discovered in this way, but what I want to emphasize here is that nowhere else can so many ideas of this nature be found welded together into such a self-consistent and coherent whole. Or it would perhaps be better to use an entirely different simile and to liken Gurdjieff's system of knowledge to a living organism, in which every part is related to and dependent on everything else.

It is because Gurdjieff's teaching possesses the qualities of coherence, integration and growth, characteristic of life, that I am attempting to bring it to the notice of other people, so far as it is possible to do this in a book. This last conditional clause is necessary, for formulation and printing squeeze out of the spoken word almost all of its vitality, as pressing deprives a flower of nearly all its beauty. The great religions have all been subjected to this devitalizing process. As taught by their great founders they were beautiful, living things, but as later set down in books and scrolls by the scribes, the Pharisees and lawyers, they become as forlorn and as desiccated as are the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church.

Unfortunately there is no way of avoiding the devitalizing effect of books on oral teaching, and all that can be done in the present instance is to warn the reader that it is bound to happen. He must be put on his guard on another score also, to wit, on the use of the word 'system' in connection with Gurdjieff's teaching. It is a term which should have been avoided, had it not been sanctioned by long use. The reason for its being objectionable is that the term 'system' is closely linked in our minds with such qualifying adjectives as correct and incorrect, orthodox and heterodox, and these are words to which Gurdjieff would have taken strong exception.

They are words to which another modern teacher of spiritual truths also takes exception: Krishnamurti deplors

our tendency to organize and systematize wisdom and illustrates this with a parable. He recounts how one day the devil and a friend of his were out for a walk on the earth when they noticed a man suddenly bend down and pick up something from the ground. The devil's friend said: 'You had better be on your guard, for that man over there has picked up a particle of Truth.' The devil smiled and was not in the least disturbed. 'It will make no difference,' he replied; 'they will organize and systematize it. There is no cause for worry.'

The Zen Buddhist Master likens all teaching to the pointing of a finger at the moon, and his disciple is very severely reprimanded if he places emphasis on the finger instead of the object at which the finger is pointing. So also must Gurdjieff's teaching be looked upon as a finger which directs attention to certain principles and methods which, properly used, lead to certain results. All that this book can do is to give the reader a notion of some of the methods and principles Gurdjieff used. To imagine that any book could achieve more than this would obviously be absurd. Gurdjieff did not draw diagrams on a board and teach from these. His method of instruction was far less comfortable to his class than this. He carved out from us living chunks of experience and taught from these. One found one's own petty vanities and follies being used as the specimens on which Gurdjieff was able to demonstrate to his class the mechanical nature of human life. A book is but a poor substitute for such vital and direct teaching as this.

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## CHAPTER II

### MAN'S SEVERAL MINDS

To maintain a group's interest in an organism of ideas, to bring something for discussion every week, to guide people through their private confusions, stupidities and difficulties for over a quarter of a century, was no mean achievement, and this is what Ouspensky did for his followers. And we, for the most part, gave him our staunch support. We were a motley crowd held together almost entirely by the teaching. There were also people who came and went — the floating population of the work; there were its beachcombers who wandered about on the edge of things picking up odd trifles but making no real efforts; there was the stranger who would turn up for a single meeting and then, not getting the answer he required of Ouspensky, would come no more; and there were visitors who were already encumbered with so much mental and emotional luggage in the way of immovable convictions, theories and firm beliefs that it was quite impossible for them to find room for anything new. There were all these and many other types of people who came to a few of Ouspensky's meetings, manifested signs of disapproval and then disappeared for good. But all the time there remained a solid core of followers who rarely missed a meeting.

Ouspensky was holding his meetings, at the time at which I joined his group, in a house in Warwick Gardens. In the large ground-floor room in which we met there was a blackboard, some forty straight-backed, hard-seated, wooden chairs, and a small table on which had been placed a carafe of water, a tumbler, a brass ashtray, a duster and a box of coloured chalks. At the table sat Ouspensky, a thick-set man

with closely cropped grey hair, a man whom, judging by appearances, I should have taken to be a scientist, a lawyer or a schoolmaster, but certainly not the exponent of what I understood to be a mystical form of philosophy. At first I found him very difficult to understand, chiefly because he spoke with such a marked Russian intonation that I had the impression that I was listening to a foreign tongue. But very soon I became accustomed to his Slavonic diction and discovered to my surprise that he possessed a very large English vocabulary. When talking to us he made little use of gestures or of the other aids employed by experienced lecturers, and this absence of art seemed to add weight to his statements. One felt that he had no desire to persuade one — as indeed he had not — and that what he said was sincere, reliable and likely to be true.

The bare room, the blackboard, duster and chalks, the hard chairs, Ouspensky's appearance, the way he peered at his notes through and sometimes over his strong glasses, his dogmatic statements, his 'let's have no nonsense' manner of conducting his meetings and his curt dismissal of many questions as too long or useless — all these things transported me straight back to the schoolroom. I was a small boy again, listening to a kindly but rather severe headmaster delivering a talk to one of the lower forms. And although I was associated with Ouspensky for nearly a quarter of a century, our relationship remained as it had begun, that of a pupil — a prefect perhaps in later years — and his headmaster. I was never completely at my ease with him and I never met or talked with him as one human should meet and talk with another human being, openly and without fear. Nevertheless I am deeply conscious of indebtedness to him, and feel that I owe to him almost as much as I owe to Gurdjieff, for without Ouspensky's help I doubt whether I should ever have understood Gurdjieff. Not that I claim, even now, to understand fully that truly astonishing man.

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always referred to his teacher in this way — was that which G himself had selected as a starting point in Moscow, namely, the study of the nature of man. He used as his text the words usually ascribed to Socrates but which are actually much older than the age of Socrates, the statement that self-knowledge is the beginning of all wisdom. He then went on to say that we had an immense amount to learn concerning ourselves, for it was a subject about which everybody was abysmally ignorant. We were, in fact, very different from what we imagined ourselves to be, and attributed to ourselves all sorts of qualities, such as inner unity, control and will, which we did not, in fact, possess. Our work must begin, therefore, with giving up the idea that we knew ourselves and with discovering what we were really like. This was a necessary preliminary to becoming something else if, after knowing ourselves a little better, we disliked some of the things we had seen and wanted to change them.

Then, without any more introductory remarks or conditional clauses or mention of extenuating circumstances, Ouspensky plunged abruptly into G's system of thought. 'Man', he said, 'is a machine which reacts blindly to external forces and, this being so, he has no will, and very little control of himself, if any at all. What we have to study, therefore, is not psychology — for that applies only to a developed man — but mechanics.'

Ouspensky said that he would begin the study of man the machine with an investigation of his mind, and G's teaching on this subject differed from all other Western teachings. It proclaimed that man possessed not just one mind but seven different kinds of mind, each of which could make its contribution to the sum total of his knowledge. The first of these minds of man was his intellectual mind, an instrument which was occupied with constructing theories and with comparing one thing with another. Man's second mind was his emotional mind, which was concerned with feelings instead of with ideas; his third mind was the mind controlling his



movements, and to his fourth mind G had given the name 'instinctive mind'. This fourth mind supervised all the physiological functions of his body, such as the processes of digestion and respiration. There was also the mind of man's sex life, and, in addition to these ordinary minds, two higher varieties of mind, the Higher Emotional and the Higher

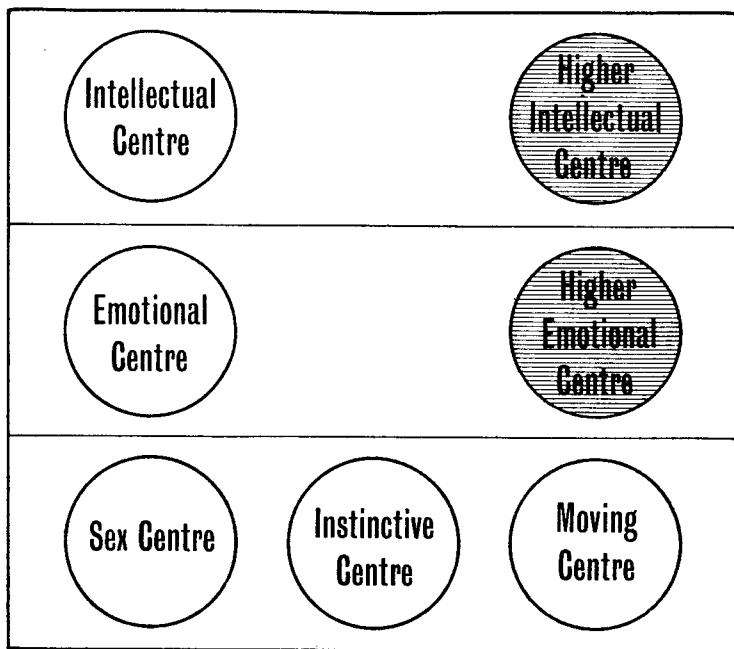


FIG. 1—Showing seven centres in man. The two higher centres which do not function in ordinary man are shaded.

Intellectual. These Higher minds did not work in ordinary people like ourselves but were active only in fully developed men. Yet they existed in ordinary people and sometimes, through some accident, for a moment or two became active in them (see Fig. 1).

The members of Ouspensky's audience who had been brought up on the Cartesian idea that the mind was a kind

of ghostly system much as an instrument of the world and of the body physically was particularly in mind for control of the body. In its own nature marvellous processes were the astonishing growth, the repair work defences against physiologic suggested by the brain, sophistically that mind interdependence, and, with G's teaching therefore, kinds of mental physiologic

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of ghostly presence that made use of the central nervous system much as a householder uses a telephone, that is to say, as an instrument for receiving messages from the outside world and for issuing orders to the body, found this idea that the body possessed so many minds a little confusing. I personally was not of the Cartesian persuasion and I was particularly interested in the idea that there existed a special mind for co-ordinating the various physiological processes in the body. For how, otherwise than by attributing to the body its own native intelligence, was it possible to explain the marvellous work the body did, the complicated chemical processes which it carried out so rapidly in its laboratories, the astonishing cleverness it displayed in the regulation of its growth, the wonderful way in which it accomplished its own repair work and the promptness with which it mobilized its defences against the attack of hostile micro-organisms? These physiological marvels had always astonished me, and they suggested very strongly that intelligence resided not only in the brain, but in all the living tissues of the body. Philosophically speaking, I had already come to the conclusion that mind and body had to be regarded as co-existent and interdependent, each being a condition of the other's existence, and, as will later be seen, this philosophy is in harmony with G's teaching on this subject. I accepted very readily, therefore, this preliminary report that there were several kinds of mind in man and that the body possessed its own physiological variety of it.

Ouspensky made free use of diagrams when teaching us, and a diagram which was frequently drawn on the blackboard was the one showing man's several minds (as in Fig. 1). He said that in this diagram man was regarded as a three-storied being, in the top story of which there resided the intellectual mind or, as Ouspensky now preferred to call it, the Intellectual Centre. In the middle story was man's emotional mind or centre, and in the lower story both his moving and his instinctive minds or centres.

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When asked where, anatomically speaking, these minds or co-ordinating centres of man were situated, he answered that they were widespread throughout the whole body, but that the maximum concentration of the intellectual centre, or what could be called its centre of gravity, lay in the head. The centre of gravity of the emotional centre was in the solar plexus, that of the moving centre in the spinal cord and that of the instinctive centre within the abdomen. Ouspensky advised that those of us who found this widespread diffusion of the various centres difficult to visualize should think of man's minds in terms of functions or activities rather than in terms of centres and anatomical structures. Instead of talking about the four lower centres, they could say that there were four different functions in a man: those of thinking, feeling and moving, and that of regulating the various physiological needs of his body. In addition to these, there were the sexual functions and the functions of higher thought and higher feeling which were only latent in us and unable to manifest themselves.

According to G, all living creatures on the earth could be classified in accordance with the number of minds or centres which they possessed, and man was the only creature on this planet equipped with an intellectual centre. The higher animals possessed emotional, moving, instinctive and sexual centres, but such lowly things as worms were devoid even of emotional centres and managed to get along with moving and instinctive centres alone.

The relative activity of the three chief centres in man (intellectual, emotional and moving-instinctive) was different in different individuals, and this provided us with a means of classifying men under three or four headings. There were men who did everything by imitating the behaviour of those around them, and who thought, felt, moved and reacted much as everybody else thought, felt, moved and reacted. Such people were controlled almost entirely by their moving centres, which possessed a special gift for imitation, and a

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man of this type would henceforth be referred to as man number one. There were other people in whose lives the emotions played a leading part, people who were guided by what they felt and by what they liked and disliked rather than by what they thought. Such people spent their lives in seeking what was pleasant and in avoiding what was unpleasant, but sometimes they reacted pathologically in the reverse way, extracting a perverted pleasure from fear and suffering and converting what was distressing into a horrid form of voluptuousness. An emotionally controlled person of this kind would be spoken of in future as man number two. Finally there was man number three, the man who was swayed by theories and by what he called his reason, a man whose knowledge was based on logical thinking and who understood everything in a literal sense. A man of this third kind would be called man number three.

Ouspensky made it clear to us that no one of these three types of men was superior to any other one and that all three stood together on the same level, equally at the mercy of their psychological machinery and without any will. All that this classification was meant to show us was that the individual behaviour and decisions of one kind of man could often be explained by the predominance in him of one kind of function, and the behaviour and decisions of another kind of man by the predominance in him of another kind of function. This method of classifying people was possible because human development was usually lopsided and it was much less serviceable when a man's development had proceeded in a more balanced way.

A properly balanced man, working as he should work, resembled a well-trained orchestra, in which one kind of instrument took the lead at one moment of the performance and another instrument at another, each making its contribution to the symphony being played. Unfortunately it rarely happened that our centres worked harmoniously, for not only was one centre liable to interfere with the work of

another centre, but it often attempted to do the work of another centre. There were occasions, for example, when our actions should be based on feeling rather than on thought, and other occasions when feelings should yield precedence to thought. But arguments often replaced feeling in the first instance, and emotions were liable to interfere with thought in the second instance. As the result of these disagreements between centres, and of the absence of any conductor of the orchestra, discords were frequently sounded, our feelings contradicting our thoughts, and our actions being at loggerheads with both our thoughts and our feelings. We resembled, therefore, orchestras which not only lacked conductors but which were composed of musicians who had quarrelled with one another. The players of the stringed instruments were no longer on speaking terms with the players of the wind instruments, and nobody in the least cared what the rest of the orchestra was doing. In short, each member of it did what he deemed to be right in his own eyes without any regard for anybody else.

Ouspensky said that to know oneself meant many years of self-study and that we must first understand the correct way of doing this. He explained that he had started by giving us G's account of the different centres because we should find it of use to us in the work we were about to undertake, that of self-observation. What was now required of us was that we should begin to observe the working of the various centres in ourselves, as they were functioning, and should assign to the appropriate centre each activity as we saw it. By obtaining our own examples of the working of these centres within ourselves we should become more and more familiar with the working of our machinery. As G had long ago remarked, the study of man began with the study of mechanics and not of psychology, for psychology was applicable only to more fully developed people. To know ourselves in the way in which it was necessary for us eventually to know ourselves was a very ambitious aim, which could only be realized after many

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years of patient and painstaking self-study. He warned us against confusing self-observation as it should be carried out with that highly unprofitable occupation known by the term introspection. Introspection was very different from self-observation. What was required of us was that we should register or take note of our thoughts, emotions and sensations at the moment of their occurrence, and introspection usually meant only thinking and dreaming about ourselves. Introspection also entailed analysis and speculating about the motives behind our behaviour, but as our pictures of ourselves were to a great extent imaginary pictures, all this speculating and probing about in the darkness was of very little profit to anybody, so far as real self-knowledge was concerned.

In observing ourselves we must look at ourselves with detachment and as though we were looking at another person about whom we knew very little. At first we might find difficulty in assigning our activities to the right centres, but with experience this would gradually become easier. For example, at first some of us would confuse thinking and feeling, and feeling and sensing, and it would be helpful to us to remember that intellectual centre worked by comparing one thing with another thing, and by making subsequent statements on the basis of this comparison, whereas emotional centre worked by recording its native likes and dislikes and acting directly on this basis. Instinctive centre was similarly occupied with deciding whether the sensations it was receiving were of a pleasant or of an unpleasant nature. We should bear in mind the fact that neither emotional nor instinctive centre ever argued or reasoned concerning anything, but because they perceived everything *directly* they returned to the perception an equally direct response. We should look upon these psychic functions of ours as being different kinds of instrument, each variety of which made its characteristic contributions to the sum total of our knowledge.

There were different ways of knowing a thing and to know

it completely was to know it simultaneously with our thinking, our emotional, and even with our moving and instinctive minds. Ouspensky warned us that whilst studying ourselves in this manner we should come across many things which we disliked in ourselves, as well as many things of which we approved. But for the time being we must be content only to note our likes and dislikes without attempting to bring about any change in ourselves. It would be a grave mistake, he said, and fortunately a mistake almost impossible to make, for us to alter anything in ourselves at this very early stage of our work.

To change something in oneself without running the risk of losing something else of value required a knowledge of the whole which we were very far from possessing. In our present state of ignorance of the whole we might struggle to get rid of some personal quality which, properly handled, might at a later date become an asset to us, or else we might strengthen some other feature in ourselves which we happened to admire, but which would be a hindrance to our future development. Moreover, if a man were able to destroy some feature in himself which he happened to dislike, he would at the same time alter the whole balance of his machinery, and thus bring about a number of unexpected changes in other parts of himself. It was fortunate, therefore, that it was beyond our present powers to tamper with ourselves, but possible only for us to see ourselves a little more clearly than we had formerly done.

Ouspensky advised us to put all activities of a doubtful character aside until we had gained greater skill in the work of sorting them out. For the present we should concentrate our attention on the classification of activities of a clear-cut nature. Then, after we had gained skill in observing the working of our various centres, we could begin the more difficult job of looking for examples of the wrong working of centres, due either to one centre attempting to perform the work of another centre, or else to one centre interfering with

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the functioning of another centre. He gave, as examples of a centre doing the work of another centre, intellectual centre pretending that it 'felt', whereas it was quite incapable of feeling anything, or emotional centre coming to a decision which it was not within its province to make. He described the moving centre as a very clever mimic and said that it often imitated other centres working, making it appear outwardly that real thinking or feeling was going on, whereas in actual fact nothing of a genuine nature was happening at all. For example, a person might read out loud from a book or talk to somebody quite impressively, yet he might be only uttering words without any more meaning for him as he uttered them than the words spoken by a parrot had any meaning for the parrot. Reading, speaking and so-called thinking on this very low level often occurred and they were all imitations of other activities concocted by moving centre.

Ouspensky pointed out that the ability of one centre to work for another could often be very useful, in that it allowed of continuity of action, but he warned us that if it occurred too often it might become a habit and thus be harmful. There were occasions, for example, when clear thinking was of vital importance, and if at a particular moment of clearer thought emotional centre intervened through sheer force of habit and took it upon itself to pass judgement on a situation for which the reason was required, the result of its untimely interference would be extremely unsatisfactory. Man, he said, was a highly complicated and delicately adjusted piece of mechanism and, if the balance between the various parts of it were upset, the whole of the machinery began to work very badly. This sort of thing happened frequently in psychotic and neurotic individuals, that each centre was continually interfering with the activity of another centre or else was attempting to do its work for it, and failing badly to accomplish it. As a result of all this interference and wrong functioning, everything in the machinery of the neurotic person was at sixes and sevens.



But badly working machinery was by no means confined to the people we labelled neurotic. Ouspensky said that although Western psychologists had recognized that wrong inner work and the interference of one psychic function with another psychic function were responsible for many nervous diseases, they had not yet realized how much faulty work went on in ordinary and supposedly healthy people. Wrong work of centres occurred in us all. It accounted for the dullness of the sensory impressions we received from the outside world, for our apathy and lack of understanding, for our inability to see things vividly and directly as a child sees them, and for the general drabness of our lives. 'Man', continued Ouspensky, 'is not only a machine but a machine which works very much below the standard it would be capable of maintaining if it were working properly. It is necessary for us, therefore, to observe ourselves very closely, not only in order to obtain knowledge of our mechanism, but also in order that we may realize how much better our machinery might be made to work. There are many defects which are common to us all as ordinary human beings, and there are also forms of bad working which are peculiar to ourselves individually. In this preliminary stage of self-study it is necessary that we should become thoroughly familiar with our own particular failings.'

As I have said earlier in this chapter, the idea that man has other minds than the single mind which the physiologists have linked with his brain and central nervous system made a strong appeal to me. Moreover, all that Ouspensky was now saying about the ability of one centre to take on the work of another centre was fully in accord with my personal experience. I could recall how long ago in learning to ride a bicycle my moving centre had, at a certain moment, taken over the work which had been performed up till then by my intellectual centre. At the beginning of the lessons an immense amount of thought had had to be directed to the way in which body-weight was distributed and, if my atten-

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tion had been allowed to stray for a moment from this task of balancing myself and of turning the handlebars in the right direction, I promptly tumbled over. Then, quite suddenly, all this thinking and scheming became unnecessary and I found myself riding a bicycle and balancing myself as though to the manner born. Something within me had suddenly assumed responsibility for the whole business of riding a bicycle, and the 'something' which had relieved the head of its previous work was clearly my moving centre. I could recall, also, the abrupt change which had taken place in my mode of speaking Spanish, when I was living in Buenos Aires. Up till a certain dramatic moment much thinking had been required for talking in Spanish, and what I had really been doing all the time was translating painfully from English into Spanish. Then, within the space of a week, a marked change occurred, and I found myself thinking and dreaming in Spanish. All need for translating had gone, and my moving centre was mimicking everybody around me and doing much of the work previously performed by my intellectual centre.

Like other people, I had some difficulty at first in distinguishing between instinctive movements and movements carried out by moving centre, but Ouspensky had helped us greatly by saying that instinctive movements were inborn, whilst moving centre movements had to be learnt. For example, the new-born infant knew how to breathe from the very start and quickly learned to suck and to swallow, but the art of walking had to be acquired painfully at a later date. Ouspensky also said that each centre possessed its own form of memory, and I recalled the surprise which I had felt on discovering that, although I had not ridden a bicycle for over twenty years, I was still able to leap on to a machine and to pedal off without thought or difficulty. My moving centre had remembered the technique of bicycle-riding all that time. Bicycle-riding also illustrated what Ouspensky had said about one centre interfering with another. If after

moving centre had taken over the responsibility for bicycling, one started to think about it and to work out intellectually how the weight should be distributed and in which direction the handlebars should be turned, one was likely to have a spill, and this was a clear instance of intellectual centre interfering with moving centre.

There was an interesting connection also between G's idea of memory in instinctive centre and Samuel Butler's view that instinct in animals, and even heredity as a whole, are the result of inherited memories. Samuel Butler protested against what he called 'shearing the thread of life, and hence of memory between one generation and its successor'. According to him, our bodies inherit memories from a long line of ancestors, memories which are carried across the gap between successive generations by the ovum and the spermatozoon. He gave, as an example of inherited memory, the fact that at a certain stage of its development within the egg the chick 'remembered' that it had to tap with its beak on the inner side of the eggshell in order to break out into the world. Not only did the chick remember how to do this, but at a still earlier stage of its development its instinctive centre had recalled in time the need for developing certain very hard cells at the tip of its beak, in order that it might be able to break the shell, and, having remembered this, it had promptly proceeded to do what was required of it. Heredity, therefore, was for Samuel Butler a manifestation of racial memory, a theory of his which had always fascinated me. And here was G supporting Samuel Butler by speaking of a memory in instinctive centre which regulated all physiological and growth processes. It was true that since the days of Weismann scientists have been of the opinion that characteristics acquired by the parents are never handed down to the offspring, but I had always been sceptical of Weismann's arguments. At heart I had always remained a heretic, a Lamarckian and an admirer of Butler.

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I made during the next few weeks by observing myself in the way Ouspensky had advised, as though taking stock of some other person with whom I was only slightly acquainted. Perhaps the earliest and most disquieting of the findings made in this way was that I was never the same for more than a few minutes, and yet I had the effrontery to preface many of my remarks with such misleading phrases as 'I always think that . . .' or 'I am convinced that . . .' or 'I feel strongly that . . .' What nonsense! I realized now that frequently I had thought and felt quite differently from the way in which I was thinking and feeling at that particular moment. And who was it that was making this dogmatic statement about his own thoughts and his feelings? Who, in short, was 'I'? Here was a problem of the first magnitude to be faced. Self-observation gave rise to a host of new questions.

Over two thousand years ago Heraclitus proclaimed that 'everything flowed', and up till that moment I had imagined that in uttering these well-known words he was referring only to the world outside ourselves. Now, as the result of only three months' self-observation, I realized that what was undoubtedly true of the world outside myself was equally true of the world within me. Everything 'flowed' within me as it flowed without me; one inner state quickly followed another, a feeling of pleasure being quickly replaced by one of displeasure, so that, when I looked within, it seemed to me that my various emotions were playing a game of family coach, all changing places. A study of these two flowings — the inner and the outer — soon convinced me that the inner was of far greater importance to me than the outer, so far as the business of living was concerned. Yet it was the instability of the outer world that I always blamed whenever anything went wrong with my life, and never the instability within me.

It was the same with other people. They were always struggling to alter things outside themselves without ever realizing the much more urgent need to change the world within. All would be well if only A, B and C would behave

differently, if the law were altered, if people were not such fools, if certain things were done which ought to be done — but they never stopped for a moment to look within at the great current of life, partly conscious, but still more unconscious, which was carrying them along as an incoming tide sweeps in on its surface fragments of wreckage and seaweed.

According to Freud, what we do, what we feel and what we think, are but the by-products of those dark and dynamic regions of the mind in which lie all our primitive animal instincts, and Freud gives us quite a good account of the subconscious mind responsible for all these activities in us. But the best descriptions of this great underground river of desires, thoughts and feelings, are to be found in the much earlier works of the Cambridge neo-Platonists written about a century ago. In 1866 E. S. Dallas gave the following dramatic description of the surge of life in the poorly lit caverns of the mind: 'In the dark recesses of memory, in unbidden suggestions, in trains of thought unwittingly pursued, in multiplied waves and currents all at once flashing and rushing, in dreams that cannot be laid . . . in the force of instinct . . . we have glimpses of a great tide of life ebbing and flowing, rippling and rolling and beating about where we cannot see it.' (Quoted by Michael Roberts in *The Modern Mind*.) No better description could be given of the force which carries us along with it, a force of life of whose existence I was now becoming dimly aware.

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### CHAPTER III

## MAN IS ASLEEP

Soon afterwards Ouspensky talked of the all-important factor of consciousness, and characteristically he plunged straight into his subject without any preamble. 'Man', he said, 'is asleep. In sleep he is born, in sleep he lives and in sleep he dies. Life for him is only a dream, a dream from which he never awakes.' It is difficult for me to recall after all these years how I took this dramatic announcement, but if my memory serves me aright it did not occasion me much surprise. After all, this was no new idea. Many people had commented on the dream-like quality of life, and I recalled the story told by that inimitable old Chinese sage, Chuang Tzu, a contemporary of Laotze. He recounts how, after falling asleep in his garden, he awoke and was puzzled to know which was a dream and which was real life. The story ran as follows: 'Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of following my fancies as a butterfly, and was unconscious of my individuality as a man. Suddenly I awoke and there I lay, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man.'

But I soon realized that Ouspensky was not speaking in a poetic or figurative manner about man's being asleep. He meant us to take his words literally, that we were all living in a sleep-walking world, a world inhabited by people who moved about in a twilight of consciousness and yet imagined themselves to be awake. What a strange idea it was, and yet

not altogether incredible. A sleeping world — people walking in the streets, sitting in government offices conducting affairs of state, hurrying into the lobby to record their votes, dispensing justice from the Bench, giving orders, writing books, doing a hundred different things, and everything done in a state of sleep. This was what he was implying.

Ouspensky next drew our attention to the fact that in the West the word 'consciousness' was very badly misused, and not only in popular speech but also by psychologists who ought to know better. Consciousness, he said, was not a function, as many Western works on psychology implied, but it was an awareness of a function. For example, some people used the word consciousness as though it were synonymous with thinking, but thought could take place without any awareness of its existence on the part of the thinker, and consciousness could exist without there being present any thought. Consciousness was a variable which exerted an influence on function, the presence of a greater degree of consciousness having the effect of improving the quality of our various activities. The more conscious we were of doing something, the better we did it. Ouspensky illustrated what he meant by means of a simile. He likened the several centres we had been studying at previous meetings to so many machines set up in a factory, machines which were quite capable of working in the dark, but which worked very much better if candles were lit in the room in the factory in which they had been installed. When electric lighting was substituted for the candles, the performance of the machines improved still further, and when the closed shutters of the factory windows were thrown wide open and daylight admitted, the machines worked at their maximum efficiency. Light here represented consciousness, and he said that experience would show us that the degree of our consciousness varied throughout the day, sometimes being a little more and sometimes a little less. If we continued to observe ourselves carefully we should find that the moments of 'coming to' and

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if realizing our existence were very short and were separated from each other by long stretches of self-oblivion, in which we thought, felt, moved and acted without being in the least conscious of our existence. It was nonsense to say, as many people did, that we were aware of ourselves, and if we were honest we should have to admit that we passed the day in a state of waking-sleep, a state which lay somewhere between sleep in bed and wakefulness or true self-awareness. We talked, performed our duties, ate and drank, wrote letters, made what we regarded as being important decisions, wrote books, made peace and declared war, in a state of consciousness so low that it was usually nearer to the condition of sleep than to that of self-awareness. Only for a moment or two did we occasionally become conscious of our existence, and then, like people who had turned over in bed and half opened their eyes, we closed them and lapsed back into our dreams again.

Ouspensky pointed out that the lower the level of our consciousness, the blinder and more mechanical became all our actions, and the more subjective we were in our outlook. When a person was asleep in bed at night he interpreted the muffled messages reaching him from the outside world entirely subjectively, weaving them into the fabric of his dreams. For example, the pressure of the bed-clothes on his feet was converted into a dream in which he imagined himself caught in the mud of a bog, just at the time that he was escaping from some enemy. Or a tingling along the nerve to the fingers would be interpreted by the dreamer as an attack being made on him by angry bees. In other words, a man's views of what was happening to him when he was asleep in bed at night were entirely subjective views, which bore very little relationship to the truth. When he got up in the morning he was able to see things a little less subjectively, but even then he was unable to see them as they really were. It was only in a higher state of consciousness that it was possible for a man to see himself and the things around him as they really were, and not merely as he imagined them to be.



Ouspensky then went on to say that there were four states of consciousness possible for man and that we were familiar only with two of these, namely, with sleep in bed at night, and with the state of consciousness in which we spent the day, a state which he proposed to call 'waking sleep'. Above these two customary states there were two higher levels of consciousness, the first of them being the state previously referred to as 'self-remembering' or true self-consciousness. Ouspensky said that this was associated with a vivid sense of one's own existence as well as of what was happening around one, and it was a state of consciousness which some of us might have experienced accidentally, especially during our childhood. The fourth and highest state of consciousness was Objective Consciousness, sometimes referred to in literature as Cosmic Consciousness. Flashes of this highest level of consciousness might also occur in quite ordinary men and women, and seemingly by accident, but if one went more carefully into the history of those who had experienced them, one found more often than not that they had subjected themselves previously to certain inner disciplines and had been deeply stirred emotionally. The best accounts of this highest state of consciousness were to be found in religious literature under the heading of illumination or enlightenment.

Ouspensky said that in a state of true self-consciousness a man was able to see *himself* objectively, as he actually was, and that in the highest state of all he could see everything else objectively. It was for this reason that this highest state of consciousness had been given the name of Objective or Cosmic Consciousness. The way to these higher states of consciousness lay through the state which was immediately below it. Thus Objective Consciousness was reached by way of the intermediate state of true self-consciousness, so that the man who had attained this level might occasionally experience flashes of the level above it, just as ordinary people who lived in a state of waking-sleep might occasionally experience accidental flashes of true self-consciousness. Only

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by prolonged work on himself and by severe inner struggle was it possible for anyone to attain these higher levels at will, and not just accidentally.

Yet man had a natural right to possess the third state of consciousness, that is to say, the state of self-awareness, which he had lost through wrong education, wrong methods of living and through the constant neglect of the higher parts of his nature. Ouspensky said that the sleep into which he had fallen was not so much a natural sleep as a trance state induced in him by the above errors, and, this being so, it was possible for him to awake from it and claim his right to true self-awareness. But for this to happen, three things were essential: first, that a man should realize that he is actually asleep; second, that he should receive help from someone who had himself managed to wake up and consequently who knew how this could be done; and third, that he should be willing to embark on a long and very difficult struggle.

At this point Ouspensky reminded us that, although the idea of man's being asleep was new to some of us, there was nothing novel in it at all. It could be found in the Gospels, where such words as 'awake', 'watch' and 'sleep' were repeatedly used by Christ. For example, there was the Gospel account of Christ's disciples being forgetful and falling asleep at a critical moment of their Teacher's life when He had left them for a time in the Garden of Gethsemane in order to go away and pray by Himself. But, said Ouspensky, people did not realize the sense in which the words 'sleep', 'awake' and 'watch' were used in the Gospels, but interpreted them wrongly or in some vague poetical sense. And even if such people were told about this third state of consciousness — that it was a state of self-awareness, a sense of being present, of being there, of thinking, perceiving, feeling and moving with a certain degree of control and not just automatically — they often said that this was their usual state and that they saw no reason for regarding it as being in any way unusual. In other words, they clung to their comforting illusions that



out of it, so that we were repeatedly losing the feeling of 'I', to awake a minute or two later to the fact that we had been completely lost in our imaginations and were now at a table staring blankly at the hands of a watch. The feeling of 'I' was evidently so weak in us that nothing was so trivial that it was not able to dispel it. It was humiliating to find how often we disappeared into cloud-cuckoo-land during the experiment, to return only much later to what we were supposed to be doing. But Ouspensky urged us to continue repeating these efforts in spite of all our failures, saying that the first step to self-remembering was that we should realize up to the hilt our complete inability to do it. He also said that the more we appreciated our present psychological state of sleep, the more we should appreciate the urgent need to change it.

For me the idea that man was asleep presented no particular difficulties and I accepted it far more readily than I had been able to accept Ouspensky's previous statement that we were machines, that everything happened in us and that we possessed no will, and the reason for the difference in my attitude to these two complementary theories was easily explained. It was that I had not yet felt in myself the full force of my mechanicalness, whereas I had experienced in my childhood those stirrings in sleep which Ouspensky had described as being moments of accidental self-remembering. I could recall how when running about in a certain meadow in Suffolk I had stopped suddenly, looked around me with surprise and, at the same time, experienced a heightened feeling of my own existence. This acute sense of 'being' was so overwhelming that it was a little bit frightening, and whenever these moments came I would usually stand there in silence until they had passed. Then the strong current of life would catch me and carry me along with it so that I would become completely immersed again in whatever I had previously been doing. After I had grown up I had read many learned psychological works by Western authors, but

nowhere was I able to find any reference to the queer changes of consciousness I had experienced. Now, for the very first time, I was hearing something which threw light on them.

And it is indeed puzzling that no Western psychologist has shown any interest in these fluctuations of consciousness. It is particularly surprising that Freud, the man who did so much to explore the subconscious and unconscious regions of the mind, never postulated the existence of states above the customary level of consciousness. If there be states below this level, then surely it is likely that there are also states above it. Yet Freud deliberately turned his back on the phenomenon of super-consciousness, or what in religious literature is known as 'illumination' or 'enlightenment'. His neglect of this subject is probably to be explained by the fact that he was a medical man, and as such was more deeply concerned with psycho-pathology than with psychology itself. Moreover he was deeply prejudiced against all forms of religious feelings, dismissing them as illusory.

It was only after I finished my examination of Freud and turned to William James, a psychological genius with a much wider vision than Freud had, that I was able to find anything relevant to the subject in which I was so deeply interested. It is obvious from the following passage that William James had himself experienced the puzzling changes of consciousness to which I am referring and possibly even higher states than these. 'One conclusion was forced upon my mind,' he writes, 'and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.' William James is right, but what he failed to add was that by the use of certain methods it is sometimes possible to break through these flimsy screens which separate one state of consciousness from another and to live for a moment or two in a world of much wider horizons

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and of far greater vividness than our usual world; in other words, 'to be' in the full sense of those words rather than merely to *exist*.

Later I discovered that William James was by no means the only Western writer who has pointed out the variability of man's consciousness. First, I ran across certain interesting references to it in the works of Dr. Hughlings Jackson, the founder of the British School of Neurology. He wrote: 'There is no such entity as consciousness — in health we are from moment to moment differently conscious.' Another reference to changes in consciousness is to be found in the writings of that much-misunderstood genius Nietzsche. 'Consciousness', he wrote, 'is regarded as a fixed given magnitude! Its growth and intermittences are denied. It is accepted as the unity of the organism. This ludicrous over-valuation and misconception of consciousness has, as a result, the great utility that a too-rapid maturing of it has been hindered. Because men believe that they already possess consciousness, they give themselves very little trouble to acquire it.' (*Joyful Wisdom*.)

It is surprising how close Nietzsche has come to what Ouspensky later said about the chief obstacle to man's acquiring more consciousness being his mistaken belief that he already possessed full consciousness, and I wondered whether Nietzsche had at one time or another established contact with Eastern teaching on this subject. This is quite possible, for it is well known that he was a great admirer of Schopenhauer, and Schopenhauer was very strongly influenced by Eastern thought.

Self-observation soon confirmed for me the truth of Ouspensky's statement that we did everything without our being aware of ourselves whilst we were doing it, our attention being entirely taken up with the activity, so that none was left over for simultaneous consciousness of ourselves. It was only by deliberately *dividing* the attention and by directing a portion of it backwards on to ourselves that

awareness of ourselves could be maintained, and I realized that this artificial division of attention was the gist of self-remembering and also of self-observation. When we made this division the backward-glancing part of our attention took note of our own thoughts, feelings and movements, and became what we now called the 'observing I' and what the Hindu philosopher calls 'the Witness'.

As we became more practised in self-observation, much of our work lay in comparing one psychic state with another psychic state; for example, contrasting the darkness of the waking-sleep in which we spent practically the whole of the day with that glimmer of light which appeared whenever the 'observing I' awoke in us for a moment or two. Naturally all self-observation came to an end when we were identified with something, since no one was present to act as observer, but occasionally we managed to catch ourselves in a transition stage, either emerging out of sleep or else on the point of slipping back into it again. If we caught ourselves in this act of disappearing, it was sometimes possible, with a special kind of effort, to struggle back again towards wakefulness. In course of time we became more and more familiar with the difference between these two contradictory movements, the outward movement of dispersal into dreams, and the reverse movement backwards towards ourselves, so that we were no longer dealing with ideas, but with actual experiences. G's statement that man was asleep passed for us out of the realm of theory into the realm of living facts.

Ouspensky told us how a deep realization that man was asleep came to him quite soon after he had heard the idea of sleep from G in the year 1915. He said that he had been seeing G off on the Moscow train, after one of his periodic visits to St. Petersburg, and that whilst walking home, along Trotsky Street, he suddenly realized that the man who was approaching him on the pavement was fast asleep. Ouspensky has since then described this episode in his book published many years later, *In Search of the Miraculous*. 'Although his

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eyes were open he was walking along obviously immersed in dreams which ran like clouds across his face. It entered my mind that if I could look at him long enough I should see his dreams. But he passed on. After came another man, also sleeping. A sleeping *izvostchik* went by with two sleeping passengers. Suddenly I found myself in the position of the prince in the "Sleeping Princess". Everyone around me was asleep. These sensations lasted for several minutes.'

This experience of waking up for a moment or two in a sleeping world, and the feeling of strangeness which accompanies it, are not usually accidental events, but are the result of previous efforts to self-remember. I have similar recollections of 'coming to' in this way. It took place during the rush hour in a London tube. There I was, a startled spectator of a strange world, gazing at serried ranks of people being carried down into the bowels of the earth on moving stairways, and at equally heavily laden stairways moving up to meet me. And they were all asleep, as I had been asleep a minute or two ago, some of them frowning, some smiling and some of them devoid of any expression at all, but with eyes which stared and saw nothing. Whither were we all bound, we entranced people, and what was the force which drew us along in our sleep? Some of us were obviously more obsessed than others with the need for speed, for these restless ones were wriggling and pushing their way through the crowd as individual fish can sometimes be seen floundering through a shoal. Where were we all going, we sleeping and hurrying people, and what should we do when we got there? Were our private wills responsible for all this commotion or were we being swept along by some great force as relentless and as impersonal in character as the drag of the moon on the seas? At one of his meetings Ouspensky had said that masses of humanity were under the influence of the moon, but for a long time I found this idea too far-fetched to be accepted.

Ouspensky repeatedly returned to the subject of self-remembering. It could be regarded, he said, as the central



idea of G's whole system of thought, and it was the answer to many of the questions we asked at meetings. 'What should I do on such an occasion?' somebody would inquire, and the answer came back promptly, 'Try to self-remember.' But if self-remembering was difficult when one was alone and in favourable circumstances, it was well-nigh impossible when in company and exposed to all the distractions of everyday life. Ouspensky was well aware of this, but he wanted us to realize more deeply than we did the fact that we were asleep, and, as he had already said, the first step to the achievement of self-remembering was the realization that we did not remember ourselves. So, little by little, the idea that man was asleep, but that by making a certain kind of effort he could stir himself out of his deepest sleep and partially 'come to', became more real to us, passing from the realm of theory into that of practice. But we knew all the time that our self-remembering, even in the most favourable of circumstances, was very incomplete, and that beyond the little we had attained lay great stretches of more intense awareness.

Looking back as I now do from the vantage point of the present, I realize that far too little emphasis was placed by Ouspensky at this time on preparation for self-remembering, and it was only after we had met G many years later in Paris that we understood how necessary this was. The first step to self-remembering was to come back from our mind-wandering into our bodies and to become sensible of these bodies. We all know, of course, that we possess limbs, a head and a trunk, but in our ordinary state of waking-sleep we receive few or no sense-impressions from these, unless we happen to be in pain. In other words, we are not really aware of our bodies. But G taught us special exercises first for relaxing our muscles to the fullest possible extent, and then for 'sensing' the various areas in our bodies, exercises to which reference will be made later in this book. These exercises became of immense value to us and were particularly useful as a preparation for self-remembering.

Further research has shown me that many writers have experienced moments of accidental self-remembering and have left excellent accounts of them. One of the best descriptions of an intenser degree of self-remembering is that given by Tennyson, who apparently had several experiences of this kind evoked by the concept 'I', a form of meditation which might easily lead to self-remembering:

For more than once when I  
 Sat all alone, revolving in myself,  
 That word which is the limit of the self was loosed,  
 And passed into Nameless, as a cloud  
 Melts into Heaven. I touched my limbs, the limbs  
 Were strange, not mine — and yet no shadow of doubt  
 But with clearness and through loss of self  
 The gain of such large life as matched with ours  
 Were Sun to spark, unshadowable in words,  
 Themselves but shadows of a shadow.

Tennyson had a poet's emotional temperament, and he penetrated deeper into the state of self-remembering than most people are able to do, except after years of practice. He also managed to bring back from his experience clear-cut memories of it, and one of the things he recalled was that self-remembering brings with it qualitative as well as quantitative changes in consciousness. By this I mean that a higher level of consciousness is the threshold to entirely new elements of experience so that one seems to have stepped abruptly through a gateway into an entirely different world and mode of living. The small limiting 'self' of everyday life, the self which insists on its personal rights and its separateness, is no longer there to isolate one from everything else, and in its absence one is received into a much wider order of existence common to all that breathes. Separateness has gone and, as the clamour of thought within dies down into the inner silence, an overwhelming sense of 'being' takes its place. Not only has the head ceased its chatter, but the very words it formerly used have lost all relevance. Such limiting concepts as 'yours' or 'mine', 'his' or 'hers', are meaningless in the

boundless realm into which one has been received, and even those old divisions of time into 'before' and 'after' have been drowned in the fathomless depths of an ever-present 'now'. So also has disappeared that distinction dear to the heart of the Western philosopher, the division between the subject and the object, the knower and the thing known. All the old partitions are down at that moment, and one becomes conscious of a unity, an intensity of existence, a blissfulness of 'being' never experienced before. The Hindu describes this ecstatic state by the Sanscrit words *sat* (being), *chit* (consciousness), *ananda* (bliss), and it gives a fitting account of it.

The condition which, above all others, is demanded of those who enter this realm of the spirit to discover unity with it is that they should shed for the moment the selfhood of space and time, that tyrannous selfhood which Jalal'-uddin has called 'the dark despot'. All who have had experience of this other state are agreed upon this point. 'No creature', wrote St. Thomas Aquinas, 'can attain a higher grade of nature without ceasing to exist', and it is the existence of the everyday self which has to be sacrificed. Yet even as one revels in the unaccustomed lightness and freedom, one is aware of the fact that near by is waiting to reclaim one that same lower and limiting self of everyday life. In a few minutes the noisy machinery of thinking, feeling and moving will start up again and the inner silence will be broken. This feeling that the busybody-self of everyday life is there waiting to claim one is very easily explained. When a higher state of consciousness is attained, it does not dislodge the state which it supplants, but is superimposed upon it, and, this being so, there exists an awareness of the close proximity of the thoughts and feelings of one's ordinary state. So close to one are these lower activities that there is a constant danger of their breaking through the thin partition and thus bringing self-remembering to an abrupt end. And it is precisely in this way that self-remembering does usually end. The attention wavers, the traffic in the head starts up its rumble again,

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the inner silence is shattered and everything is as it was before.

Again, William James is the only Western psychologist who shows an understanding of these higher states of consciousness. He writes that the two outstanding characteristics of these higher states are optimism and monism: 'We pass into mystical states from out of ordinary consciousness as from a less into a more, as from smallness into a vastness, and at the same time as from unrest to rest. We feel them as reconciling, unifying states. They appeal to the yes-function more than to the no-function in us. In them the unlimited absorbs the limited and peacefully closes the account.'

William James might have added two other characteristics of higher states of consciousness, and more particularly of that highest state of all, Cosmic Consciousness. The first of these qualities is the intense conviction of truth which they carry with them. Difficult though the individual may find it to formulate what he has learnt, he has no doubt of its truth. It is knowledge which has been reached by a route other than that by which ordinary knowledge is acquired, namely, through the intermediary of the special senses and the reason. It is *direct* and *immediate* knowledge as opposed to *indirect* and *mediate* knowledge.

Richard Gregg puts very clearly the difference between these two ways of knowing. He writes that we can learn a great deal about an object in the external world by viewing it from a number of different angles and then giving a general description of it. But with this way of knowing we are conscious of the separation between ourselves and the thing we are observing, so that it is 'knowing about' it rather than 'knowing' it. When we know something *directly*, this feeling of separation disappears. 'There is a blending of subject and object, a mutual absorption, a forgetting of everything else; there is often delight, an exaltation, an enthusiasm, a rapture, a deep and abiding joy. . . . It is not knowing from without; it is a knowing from within. It is not knowing about; it is

unitive knowing. Unitive knowledge is much more complete and deeper than knowing about.' (Richard Gregg, *Self Transcendence*. Victor Gollancz, 1956.)

Different people have different attitudes to these two ways of knowing. Intellectuals and scholars distrust the direct, intuitive and non-logical mental process described above, whilst artists, poets, mystics and, strange to say, certain business men with great practical experience of life are more inclined to doubt the efficacy of logical processes. Each party is able to find justification for distrusting the other kind of knowing, since mistakes can, and are often made with both methods. The truth is that each way of knowing has its value and is constantly being used. Even the scientist, the man who is specially expert in walking round a subject and viewing it from all angles, has probably started his peregrinations by accepting as true some idea reached intuitively and directly.

The second characteristic of higher states of consciousness, and particularly of the highest state of all, is the marked change which takes place in the sense of time. Dr. Bucke, a Canadian psychiatrist, who made a special study of Cosmic Consciousness at the end of the last century, writes that the person who experiences 'cosmic consciousness will learn in the few minutes or moments of its continuance, more than in months, than in years, of ordinary study, and he will learn much that no study ever taught a man or ever can teach him. Especially does he obtain a conception of the *whole* or, at least, of such an immense whole as dwarfs all conception, a conception of it which makes his old attempts to grasp the Universe and its meaning, petty and ridiculous.'

Dr. Bucke gives the following account of his own experience of cosmic consciousness in the third person, and it will be noted that he lays emphasis on the impression of light associated with it. 'He was in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment. All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around, as it were, by a flame-coloured cloud. For an instant he thought of fire, some

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sudden conflagration in the great city; the next he knew that the light was within himself. Directly afterwards there came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness, accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. Into his brain streamed one momentary lightning flash of the Brahmic Splendour which has ever since lightened his life; upon his heart fell one drop of Brahmic Bliss, leaving thenceforward, for always, an after taste of heaven.' (R. M. Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*.)

The experience of the man who has savoured this highest of all levels of consciousness is always of this nature. He is overwhelmed by the magnitude and the splendour of the vision vouchsafed him, and is so convinced of its truth that nothing can shake his faith in it; he is astonished by how much has happened within so short a space of time; finally, the memory of that moment of Brahmic splendour never fades and is treasured as something which has imparted a meaning to life.

The above description applies only to the highest state of consciousness, or Cosmic Consciousness, a level which but few people have attained. In this chapter we are concerned chiefly with the state below it, called by G 'self-remembering', a state in which a man is able to see himself but not the universe objectively. Maurice Nicoll has described this less exalted state in these quiet words: 'Self-Remembering comes down from above and full Self-Remembering is a state of consciousness in which the Personality and all its pretences almost cease to exist and you are, so to speak, nobody and yet the fullness of this state which is really bliss, makes you, for the first time, somebody.'

## CHAPTER IV

### KNOWLEDGE AND BEING

In the previous chapters the mechanical nature of man and the low level of consciousness on which he lives were discussed. In this chapter a very important principle in G's system of knowledge will be enunciated, namely, the principle that man's development must proceed simultaneously along the two parallel lines of *knowledge* and *being*.

Ouspensky began his talk on this subject by saying that everybody recognized the importance of an increase of knowledge, but few people ever stopped to consider the equally pressing need for an increase of being. They did not even understand what was meant by the word 'being', so something must be said on this subject first. For most people the word 'being' meant only existence, but it was possible to exist in many different ways and on many different levels. There was, for example, a great difference between the 'being' of a stone and that of a plant, and again between the 'being' of a plant and that of a man. What was not understood was the fact that there could exist an equally great distance between the 'being' of one man and that of another man.

Even fewer people realized that a man's knowledge depended on his being. Here in the West it was taken for granted that provided a man had a good brain and was sufficiently industrious, he could acquire any knowledge he liked, and also that he would understand whatever he had studied. His being — that is to say, all that he stood for — did not matter at all so far as the knowledge he could acquire and his understanding of it were concerned. He could become a very great philosopher or scientist, make important

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discoveries and at the same time remain as he was, a mean, vain and pretentious petty egoist, more deeply asleep even than his fellow men. This was how the West looked upon the subject of being and knowledge, but the people of Eastern culture knew better than this. In the East a man went into training for the reception of truth, just as an athlete went into training for a race, and in the Eight-fold path of Buddha it was laid down that a right mode of living was one of the requisites for acquiring right knowledge. An Oriental philosopher knew that if a man's knowledge got ahead of his being it would be misused, that it would become more and more theoretical and less and less applicable to his life. Instead of being a help to him, it might in the end complicate his existence still further. One of the distinguishing features of impractical knowledge of this kind was that it was always knowledge of the part and never knowledge of the whole.

For the proper development of a man, progress had to take place simultaneously along the two lines of being and of knowledge. For progress along the line of being we must struggle with our weaknesses — and most of all with the weakness of sleep — and at the same time we had to acquire what we could in the way of knowledge. If our knowledge is allowed to outrun our being, the result would be that we should know in theory what we ought to do but should not be able to do it, whereas if it were being which outstripped knowledge, then we should be in the position of people who had acquired new powers but had no idea what to do with these powers.

Ouspensky said that there was another common cause of confusion on the subject of knowledge. It was that people mistook knowledge for understanding, but knowledge was one thing and understanding another thing, and a great gulf often lay between the two. Knowledge did not of itself confer understanding on a person, nor did understanding necessarily arrive with a further accession of knowledge. Understanding was the outcome of a certain relationship between



knowledge and being, and we could therefore regard it as being the resultant between the two. Another important thing about understanding was that it always entailed a realization of the relationship existing between the object studied and something bigger; between the cell and the body; between the individual man and mankind; between mankind and organic life; between organic life and the earth; between the earth and the sun, and between the solar system and the whole universe.

Ouspensky then pointed out that, although knowledge was increasing in the Western world, understanding of that knowledge lagged far behind. This was an age of specialism, and specialism entailed knowing less and less about the relationship of the part to the whole. It was this piecemeal method of studying things which was in great part responsible for the rarity of understanding at the present time. Another cause of confusion was that very few people realized how subjective was the language they were using and how much they were in its power. They imagined that they were employing words in the same sense, whereas they were often using them in quite different senses. It was true that information of a practical nature could be exchanged in this way but, when practice was left and abstract terms were being used, misunderstanding immediately began. One had only to listen to an argument between two educated people to realize that they were often in agreement and only appeared to be in opposition because they were using words differently, or conversely, that they actually disagreed although they imagined that they had come to the same conclusions.

When looked at from the standpoint of Centres, understanding really meant understanding in more than one centre. For example, on first hearing the idea of mechanicalness a man accepted it, if he did actually accept it, only in Intellectual Centre, as the behaviourist supporters of mechanicalness accepted it. It appeared to be a reasonable theory to such a man, and he subscribed to it as such. But if

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he continued to work on himself and to observe himself as impartially as possible, the day would eventually arrive when he would feel the full force of his mechanicalness carrying himself along with it. He would know what it was like to be swept along by the force of life, as a swimmer is swept out to sea by a strong current, and he would then understand mechanicalness in Emotional Centre as well. The idea would have passed out of the sphere of theory into that of practice and he would understand the idea of mechanicalness in quite a different way. Later still he might feel mechanicalness in all his centres, and at that moment an idea which up till then had been only a lodger in the mind would pass automatically into the home realm of understanding.

'There are two lines therefore along which we have to work,' continued Ouspensky, 'the line of knowledge and the line of being, and as I have already told you, the chief obstacle to progress along the latter line is the obstacle of sleep. Our chief efforts must therefore be directed to struggling with sleep.' Here he reminded us of what he had previously said about the nature of this sleep, that it resembled the coma induced by narcotics or by hypnotic suggestion rather than a natural sleep. Consequently it would be useful for us to start work on the line of being with a very careful study of the various causes which kept us asleep. If we did this, we should find a most important cause to be the wrong work of centres. This could take many different forms but the commonest of all our errors was our tendency to 'identify' ourselves with everything around us. By the words 'identify' and 'identification' was meant that a man lost all sense of himself and of his existence in a single thought, feeling or movement, forgetting all other thoughts, feelings or movements. He flowed, as it were, into whatever happened to have captured his attention at that particular moment, so that he entirely ceased to be aware of himself and to exist as a person. The level of his consciousness sank even lower than its usual level at such times, and his field of awareness became so

small that it had room for only a single idea, perception or emotion.

Ouspensky impressed on us the fact that identifying was a formidable and an extremely subtle enemy. It permeated our lives to such an extent that we could be said to pass from one identification to another, scarcely ever being free from it. What made the struggle against it more difficult was that identifying was always assuming honourable disguises and misleading us into believing that it was our friend and something we were unable to do without. For example, most people thought it right and proper that an artist should lose himself entirely in his painting and should become oblivious of everything else. So also did they respect Isaac Newton for the state of identification into which he fell when, whilst studying the laws of motion, he placed his watch, instead of the egg his wife had brought him, into a saucepan and boiled it for his lunch. How magnificent, they said, was this whole-hearted focusing of his attention on to the problem on which he was engaged and how whole-hearted his dismissal of everything else from his mind! But, said Ouspensky, this is an entire misrepresentation of what actually happened. Instead of Newton's directing his attention, by an act of will, on to the problem he was studying, his attention was caught and imprisoned by it so that everything else, including all sense of his own existence, completely disappeared. In other words, by becoming completely identified with his mathematical problem, Newton went more deeply to sleep than was his wont. 'Yes, but it paid Newton to do this,' the critic will here protest, 'for in that state of identification he succeeded in discovering the laws of motion.' Newton was a genius, and although he was able to work on the laws of motion when deeply asleep, he would probably have discovered them a little sooner had he been less identified!

The chief difference between identification, or the mechanical entanglement of the attention in some problem, and an attention which has been deliberately directed on to

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it, is that identification has the effect of narrowing the field of consciousness, whereas directed attention usually widens it so that more things come within it. It is this narrowing effect of identification which explains the popular saying that a person is unable to see the wood for the trees. What has happened here is that his attention has been imprisoned by one or two of the trees so that nothing else is able to come into view. Similarly, by identifying with an anxiety, disappointment or source of irritation, we put ourselves completely in its power, so that it is impossible to think or feel about anything else. Ouspensky pointed out that identifying was the chief obstacle to self-remembering, for it imprisoned a man in some small part of himself, and was therefore the very antithesis of that widening and raising of the level of consciousness brought about by self-remembering. In short, identification led to loss of all sense of existence, to deeper sleep, greater subjectiveness of outlook and absence of all ability to exercise the most modest range of choice.

Ouspensky repeated that all day long we were passing from one form of identification to another form of it, and that nothing was so trifling that we were unable to become identified with it. A man could become identified even with an ashtray, and if an ashtray could act in this way it was easy to see how a man's possessions, his successes and his enjoyments, gave him still ampler opportunities for identification. What was more difficult to understand was how a man could be equally well lost in his miseries and misfortunes, and yet such was the case. Ouspensky said that G had often commented on man's partiality for his own and for other people's griefs, and had remarked that the *last thing that a man was willing to give up was his suffering*. He would agree, on certain occasions, to renounce his pleasures, but he was so constituted that he clung with the greatest possessiveness and tenacity to his sufferings. It was obvious that anyone who had a desire to develop would have to sacrifice his grievances and his sufferings, for an identification with negative emotions entailed an

enormous wastage of nervous energy, a wastage which it was imperative that we should save. Ouspensky said that identification with negative emotions played such havoc with our lives that it would be useful to us to make a list of the particular unpleasant emotions to which we were specially partial. Everybody, he said, had his own particular favourites in the way of negative emotions, and we had to become better acquainted with them.

We took his advice and by doing so learnt how powerful was the influence exerted by negative emotions on our lives. We saw how we ennobled these unpleasant feelings when they arose in us, and how we persuaded ourselves that it was only right and proper that we should have them, justifying our anger or irritation by means of such phrases as 'righteous indignation'. We found ourselves enjoying our sufferings, especially when we were able to blame other people for them, as we almost always managed to do. We saw also how we accepted the portrayal of violence, despair, frustration, melancholy and self-pity on the stage and in literature as the highest forms of art, and how cleverly we disguised from ourselves the fact that we were extracting immense enjoyment out of misery and suffering.

When we reported at a subsequent meeting our findings on the subject of negative emotions and said that we were appalled how big a part they played in our lives, Ouspensky repeated what he had previously said: that for the present we should not attempt to alter things in ourselves merely because they were unpleasant. But he now made a slight addition to the task he had given us of observing our negative emotions. It was that we should do our best *not to express them* immediately on feeling them, as we had always done in the past. By expressing them he meant not only giving vent to them in words, but also revealing them in our actions and general behaviour, and he explained that the reason why we should avoid doing this was that it had now become so automatic in us to give immediate free vent to all our unpleasant feelings

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that we did this usually without being in the least aware of what we were doing and saying. But if the expression of unpleasant emotions were forbidden us, then this rule would sometimes come into our minds just at the moment at which we were about to manifest them, and by giving us a wholesome jolt would enable us to become aware of emotions which otherwise might have passed unnoticed.

Our observation of all forms of negative emotions yielded truly astonishing harvests. Even members of the group who prided themselves on being of a cheerful and even-tempered disposition discovered that irritation, jealousy, envy, anger and disapproval of others, were continually arising in them. As we acquired skill in observing ourselves we became more and more familiar with the very unpleasant physical sensations which accompanied our various negative emotions, and learned how quickly the poisons they engendered permeated our bodies. We also learned from bitter experience how drained we were of all energy after having given way to a negative emotion, so that there was no longer any need for Ouspensky to tell us that we lost a great deal of valuable energy through them. Sometimes we actually felt the energy pouring out of us and learnt to our cost that once we had yielded ourselves to them — as we almost always did — there was no possibility of getting rid of them. There we had to remain in their power until they had burnt themselves out. The best hope of learning how to avoid falling such an easy prey to negative emotions appeared to lie in becoming more and more sensitive to the early signs of their advent, and, having detected their close proximity to us, to step aside in time. If we waited too long before we did this we were completely in their power.

All teachers have favourite passages in the lessons they are giving, and if there were any particular statement of G's which delighted Ouspensky more than another, it was his remark that negative emotions were entirely unnecessary to us, and that Nature had not even provided a proper recording

place for them. Ouspensky pointed out that whereas the intellectual and the moving-instinctive centres possessed their negative sides, emotional centre was without one. This was a guarantee, he said, if any guarantee were needed, that negative emotions were artificial products entirely unnecessary to living.

Somebody inquired about fear and asked whether it should be included amongst the negative emotions. To this Ouspensky replied that this depended on the nature of the fear, for there were many different kinds of fear. There was, for example, the fear registered by the body when it felt itself slipping towards the edge of a cliff, or when it realized that it was on the point of being run over by a rapidly approaching car, and such fears as these were useful to us because they mobilized our efforts to escape from danger with a speed which far exceeded the quickness of thought. But in addition to these warnings of the presence of physical danger there were also the numerous fears which came under the general heading of anxiety, and many fears of this kind originated in the imagination and had no real existence. We were scared of a great many things which might conceivably happen to us, but which were unlikely to happen and never did actually happen. Ouspensky said that many people spent their time inventing such fears, and, having invented them, in justifying them. 'One has to show forethought and be ready for difficulties when they come', they said, and then proceeded to invent new fears. Imaginary fear of this kind had to be included amongst the negative emotions, and if we were ever to get rid of them the first thing to do was to see them much more clearly, and the second to cease justifying them.

This, of course, applied to all our negative emotions, that we had to realize that it was *we* who were responsible for them and that we must not immediately put the blame for them on other people. Another person might have acted as the exciting cause of a negative emotion, but the unpleasant manifestation itself was our own, and not his. If

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therefore we wanted ever to become free from negative emotions we must straight away accept full responsibility for them, and never, on any occasion, find excuses for them. In other words, we could not enjoy simultaneously two entirely incompatible pleasures, that of putting the blame for our negative emotions on to somebody else, and the pleasure of eventually escaping from them entirely. We must choose one of these two alternatives and give up the other.

Ouspensky then went on to say that there was a common form of identification which played a very large part in keeping us asleep and which was known as inner considering. Inner considering meant identification with oneself or with what one took to be oneself, for everybody had a picture of himself, partly authentic and partly fictitious. Having painted this self-portrait, the individual was always presenting it to the world in the hope that the world would accept it as a striking likeness. This work of producing himself, in the theatrical sense of that word, to the world took much of a man's time, so that he was often very preoccupied when talking with other people with the impression he was producing on them. He took careful note of their reactions to what he was saying, watched their facial expressions, paid attention to the tone of their voices in replying to him, to what they had said and had not said, weighed the respect with which they had received him, the interest they had displayed in his conversation and manifested in many other ways how occupied he was with the effect he was having on them. This intense preoccupation with the impression being made on other people and the feeling of inadequacy which often accompanied it was usually called shyness or self-consciousness, but it was the very antithesis of true self-consciousness and was a manifestation of deeper sleep.

Identification with the self of everyday life, or what Western psychologists call the 'ego', may take many different forms. Freud declares that the ego is first and foremost a body ego, and it is quite true that much inner considering is



evoked by a person's notions about his body and its actual or supposed peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses. Many examples of over-sensitivity on the part of a highly intelligent and otherwise sensible person about his physical oddities can be found in autobiographies. Tolstoy writes in his *Memories of Childhood* that he was particularly sensitive about his appearance when a young man and was of the opinion 'that no human being with such a large nose . . . such thick lips, and such small grey eyes [as his], could ever hope to attain happiness on this earth'. Even when someone makes jokes about his own personal peculiarities, and appears not to be in the least concerned with them, his light-heartedness and laughter may be a screen behind which he is hiding sorely wounded feelings. The late H. G. Wells was an example of this, for he wrote in his *Autobiography*: 'In the secret places of my heart I wanted a beautiful body, and all the derision and humour with which I treated my personal appearance in my talking and writing to my friends, my caricature of my leanness and my unkempt shabbiness, did not affect the profundity of that unconfessed mortification.'

But identification with the 'ego' may spread far beyond the confines of the physical body, so that a man may be over-sensitive about a hundred real or supposed deficiencies or weaknesses in his character and his personal history. He may be distressed on the subject of his upbringing, his parentage, his lack of education, his social standing, his failure to obtain advancement. All of these supposed deficiencies have to be hidden by him from the world and his strong points have to be brought into the foreground when he is talking to other people. The man who is inner considering resembles very closely a commercial traveller with a brand of goods to sell. Great skill will have to be used in doing this, and it will probably be necessary for him to introduce his goods very discreetly so that he appears not to be pushing them forward at all. Excessive modesty and making fun of oneself (as exemplified by H. G. Wells) are often good tactical moves in the

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grand strategy of inner considering. 'Of course, I really know very little about this subject' may be the opening gambit to a brilliant piece of talking which wins not only the admiration of the audience but a special prize for modesty as well.

Like other highly mechanized activities in us, inner considering is highly contagious. When the person to whom we are talking begins to inner consider, the emotional tension rises, and as a result of this we feel uncomfortable and begin to inner consider ourselves. We feel that something has gone amiss with both the conversation and our relationship with the other person and that it is up to us to put things right. Perhaps we were rather tactless in our handling of the other person a little earlier on, and, as a result of this, he is now offended with us. We decide that we must tread more carefully, and the consequences of our efforts to undo the mischief may well be that the inner considering grows worse. Inner considering is a sign of inner weakness, and it is often due in great part to our fear of other people. It is astonishing how frightened we human beings are of our fellow men.

Controlled and blinded as we are by these inner compulsions, it would be absurd, therefore, for us to imagine that on our ordinary level of being we are capable of understanding another person, let alone of giving him help. We cannot even see that other person as he is, but only as he appears through the distorting glasses of our various likes and dislikes, prejudices and aversions. No one is capable of entering into and understanding another person unless he has first entered into and understood himself, and even when he is possessed of this self-knowledge a man will often make mistakes. I am still appalled at the very little I am able to see of the person to whom I am talking and at my inability to feel him. We talk together and even of intimate things but as complete strangers to each other.

External considering is the precise opposite of inner considering, and it would be the correct antidote to inner

considering if we could only manage to produce it when required. But external considering is an extremely difficult accomplishment, as difficult to evoke in ourselves as is self-remembering. It demands an entirely different attitude and relationship to other people, namely, a preoccupation with *their* welfare instead of with our own. The man who considers externally does his best to understand the other person and to see what are his needs, and he is only able to do this if his own requirements are entirely put on one side. External consideration demands of the man who is practising it a great deal of knowledge and an equal amount of self-control, and this means that it can never happen automatically in a state of sleep, but necessitates a state approaching self-remembering. No person who externally considers can ever talk to another person 'for his good', or 'to put him right', or 'to explain to him his own point of view', for external consideration makes no demands and has no requirements other than those of the person addressed. It allows of no feeling of superiority on the part of the person who is externally considering, for what he is trying to do is to put himself into the other man's place in order that he may be able to discover his needs. This necessitates the abandonment of the last shred of self-identification and, in order that the other person may be seen as he really is, the distorting glasses of the personality, with all its subjective likes and dislikes, have to be laid on one side so that he is viewed as objectively as possible.

Ouspensky went on to say that all highly mechanized activities help to keep us as we are, in a state of sleep, and, this being so, we must beware of them. Identification with the so-called 'self' or inner considering were only two of them, and three other activities, which went by themselves without the need of any attention, were equally soporific. They were lying, unnecessary talking and imagination. The word 'lying' was used by G in a rather special sense. In ordinary parlance it meant departing from the truth, but since we rarely knew the truth, we could not be blamed for

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departing from it. But we could be blamed for speaking about things as though we knew all about them, when in actual fact we knew little or nothing about them, and this, Ouspensky said, was one of the commonest of mechanical man's activities. People talked with the utmost confidence of things concerning which they understood nothing at all, and this was what G called lying. What we believed and disbelieved depended to a great extent on our personalities, and our personalities in turn were dependent on accident.

When lying is analysed it is found to be compounded of the two other highly mechanized functions against which Ouspensky had warned us at a previous meeting: unnecessary talking and imagination. The former will be discussed first, and the part of intellectual centre which is responsible for it is 'formatory centre', the lowest part of it. In some people 'formatory centre' was never out of action. Such people talk without ceasing in tubes and buses ('I gave him a bit of my mind I did, I said to him . . .'); they talk in the morning when they are rested and they talk still more in the evening when they are tired; they talk whether people are there to listen to them or not. They talk when they are well and they continue to talk when they are ill, and should their illness be serious and an operation be required they are still talking when the anaesthetic mask has been firmly clamped down on to their faces and the nitrous oxide gas has been turned on. And their talk is all about nothing and chiefly about the nothing which is themselves. It is a terrible scourge, this high-pressure non-stop production of words, both to the talker and to the person talked to, and it consumes an immense amount of valuable nervous energy.

Nor is the taciturn person necessarily free from it, for a great deal of low-grade soundless conversation may be going on within him. If we watch carefully the faces of people we pass in the street we often see their lips moving, and at the same time a change of expression spreading over their faces. They smile or they frown as they pass us, and their smiles and

their frowns have nothing to do with us at all. They have not even noticed our presence on the pavement for they are miles away in their dreams, and living perhaps in an entirely different moment of time. They are not present in the here and the now, but are rehearsing in their imagination a difficult interview which is about to take place, or they are recalling with pleasure the witty things which they said a month or two ago. In half an hour or so these same people will be talking out loud with their friends, but in the meantime they are caught up on the wings of fantasy and are conversing silently with themselves.

Whenever Ouspensky advised us, as he frequently did, to keep a tight rein on our imaginations, the artists in the group were outraged, for they believed him to be maligning the fount of all their artistic inspirations. Was not the imagination responsible for everything they did, whether it was the painting of a picture, the writing of a poem or the composition of music? Time after time Ouspensky was compelled to explain to them that the creative imagination of the artist, the faculty by which he visualized and held in his mind the thing which he was about to create, was a very different activity from mind wandering. Visualization required an effort of sustained attention on the artist's part, whilst day-dreaming went on by itself. It was the activity which went by itself that had the action of a narcotic on us. Imagination, in the sense in which Ouspensky was using that word, meant anything which went on by itself and without any attention, and, since this could happen in any centre, imagination was by no means confined to the making of images in intellectual and emotional centres.

If somebody had asked us during those many years of attending Ouspensky's meetings what we were engaged in, and we had been allowed to answer this question truthfully and tersely, we could have given no better summing-up of our endeavours than to have stated that we were occupied in the training of our powers of attention. The capacity to

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direct the attention was obviously of prime importance to our work and it entered into almost everything we were trying to do. It was through lack of attention that our efforts to self-remember were so often unsuccessful, and it was for the same reason that our attempts to carry out the extremely complicated movements brought back by G from his travels were continually going wrong. Arrangements had now been made for us to be taught these special exercises and for me they proved particularly valuable. Previously I had always prided myself on my powers of attention, but by becoming a member of these movement classes at Virginia Water I soon discovered how limited my powers of attention actually were. The movements acted as a very sensitive apparatus which recorded the wanderings of my attention in the same way that the smoked cylinders used in a physiological laboratory record such activities as the beating of the heart, the movements of respiration and the rise and fall of the blood pressure. One or two moments of mind wandering and all co-ordinated movements collapsed, so that there was displayed to anybody who cared to see it the limited nature of my powers of attention. It was a humiliating but at the same time a very profitable experience.

But the movements and sacred dances brought back by G from the East had a much wider function than that of revealing to the performer his lack of attention. At a public demonstration of these dances in the United States G explained to the audience that sacred dances and gymnastics had for many centuries played an important role in the religious ceremonies of temples in Turkestan, Tibet, Afghanistan, Kafiristan and Chitral. They were amongst the most important of the subjects taught in Eastern Esoteric Schools and were used there for two main purposes. The first was to express by means of them a certain form of knowledge, and the second was to induce in the performers a harmonious state of being. Gurdjieff ended his talk by saying that in ancient times a man who had devoted himself to

some special study might express what he had learnt in dances just as a researcher of today would publish his results in a treatise. 'Thus the ancient sacred dance is not only the medium of an aesthetic experience but also a book . . . containing a definite piece of knowledge.'

At a later meeting Ouspensky redrew the diagram of the centres on the board, this time for the purpose of showing us the important role played by attention in all of our work. He said that each of the centres could be subdivided into several parts. The first division was into positive and negative sides, and the second was the further subdivision of these positive and negative halves into moving, emotional and intellectual segments. He said that the dividing up of the centres in this way was best illustrated by a consideration of Intellectual Centre. First came the division of intellectual centre into positive and negative halves. Both affirmation and negation were necessary in thinking, but in some people one of these two sides was too active. There were people who had a tendency to say 'No' to everything, and there were others who were more inclined to say 'Yes'. There were also strange mixtures of affirmation and negation in our conduct. In certain cases negative thinking was associated with positive feeling, and in other cases positive thinking was associated with negative feeling. An excellent example of these mixtures of affirmation and negation was to be found in Christ's parable of the two sons. 'A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go to work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whither of them twain did the will of his father?' (Matthew xxi, 28-31.)

Ouspensky explained that it was the second subdivision of the two halves of centres into moving, emotional and intellectual, which was closely related to the subject of attention. The difference between these three parts of Intellectual

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Centre was that in the lowest or moving part of it thinking went on without any attention at all; in the second or emotional part attention was attracted by the intrinsic interest of the subject; and in the third highest and intellectual part of Intellectual Centre attention had to be directed on to the subject by an effort, as when a person was learning a new language or reading a difficult book. The same was true of the subdivision of the other centres into moving, emotional and intellectual parts.

'The lowermost or moving part of intellectual has been given a special name', continued Ouspensky. It is called 'formatory centre', and it resembles a large ground-floor office in which are a number of junior clerks, typists and telephone operators at work. Their duty is to receive and to sort out messages coming in from the outside world and to pass the more important of them on to the various managers in their offices upstairs. But instead of doing this the ground-floor underlings frequently deal with these matters themselves, with disastrous consequences to everybody. Formatory centre is capable only of carrying on a low-grade type of associative thinking and it often behaves precisely as these junior clerks, typists and telephonists behave. It makes decisions which by rights should be made only by the intellectual part of Intellectual Centre and with particularly unhappy results.

At a very much later date the great importance of the faculty of attention in our work was again brought home to us. This was after Ouspensky's death, when some of us went over to Paris to study under G himself. G immediately taught us a number of exercises in muscle-relaxing and in what he called 'body-sensing', exercises which were and still are of the greatest value to us. We were told to direct our attention in a predetermined order to various sets of muscles, for example, those of the right arm, the right leg, the left leg and so on, relaxing them more and more as we come round to them again; until we have attained what we feel to be the



utmost relaxation possible for us. Whilst we were doing this we had at the same time to 'sense' that particular area of the body; in other words, to become aware of it. We all know, of course, that we possess limbs, a head and a body, but in ordinary circumstances we do not feel or sense them. But with practice the attention can be thrown on to any part of the body desired, the muscles in that particular area relaxed, and sensation from that region evoked. At the word of inner command the right ear is 'sensed', then the left ear, the nose, the top of the head, the right arm, right hand and so on, until a 'sensation' tour has been made of the whole body. The exercise can, if required, be rendered still more difficult by counting backwards, by repeating strings of words or by evoking ideas at the same moment that the relaxing and sensing is being carried out.

The question may well be asked: 'What benefit can possibly result from learning all these yogi tricks with the body?' This is not difficult to answer. There are three reasons for doing such exercises as these: the first is that it is excellent training for the attention; the second that it teaches a person how to relax; and the third that it produces a very definite inner psychic change. This change can be summed up in the statement that the exercise draws together parts of our mechanism which previously had been working disconnectedly. But external descriptions of these valuable exercises and of the results obtained from them are quite useless. They can only be understood by personal experience of them, a fact which emphasizes once again the impossibility of imparting knowledge of this kind in a book. All special exercises of this kind have to be taught by word of mouth, and, so far as I know, they have never been committed to writing. It is for this reason that my description of them has deliberately been left incomplete.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE SEARCH FOR A SELF

I WAS puzzled at first by what seemed to me to be a lack of plan in Ouspensky's method of expounding G's system. Instead of completing a subject and then passing on to something else, he would repeatedly return to what he had dealt with earlier, in order to add some details he had previously omitted. But I realized later that no plan was possible. In the first place, he was not delivering a series of formal lectures, but was answering questions as they arose in meetings, and, in the second place, everything in G's system was so closely interconnected with everything else that it was quite impossible to deal with anything in isolation. Because of this we were compelled to pass backwards and forwards continually, for the discussion of a new subject frequently revealed some aspect of an old one which had not been dealt with and this necessitated a re-examination of what had previously been said.

After having drawn our attention to the extremely mechanical activities which helped to keep man asleep, Ouspensky returned to man's many illusions about himself. 'One of the most cherished and most ridiculous of these illusions', he said, 'is that he possesses a permanent "self" or master "I" which imparts uniformity to his life and controls his various functions. But perhaps as the result of self-observation during the last few months you have managed to get rid of this absurd idea about yourselves. You may have found out by now that there is no such thing within you as a permanent "I".'

Ouspensky then walked over to the blackboard and drew

on it a circle which he proceeded to sub-divide, by means of vertical and transverse lines, into a large number of small compartments, so that his final drawing resembled the picture of a bee's eye as seen under a high magnification. In each of the numerous facets of the eye he inscribed the capital letter 'I' and when he had finished his picture he went back to his chair. 'That', he announced, with the satisfaction of an artist who has completed a satisfactory portrait, 'is a picture of man. He has not one "I" but innumerable "I's". They are continually replacing each other, one "I" being there at one moment and another "I" at the next moment. Every thought and every feeling can and does claim to be "I" until it has been pushed into the background and its place taken by another competitive "I".'

Someone asked how it was that we had the very strong conviction that we did, in fact, possess both unity and permanence, and Ouspensky replied that there were two things which encouraged this idea. The first was that we possessed a single body, and the second that we went through life with a single and permanent name. 'It is true', he added, 'that our bodies change in the course of years but they change so slowly that we do not notice it, and our names remain with us throughout our lives. These two stable things help to produce in us an illusion of permanence and unity, qualities which, if we observe ourselves a little more carefully, are found to be entirely non-existent. Not only does every thought, every feeling, every sensation in us, claim the right to say "I", but what is still more dangerous, it makes decisions for which the rest of us will later become responsible. For example, one reckless "I" may promise somebody to do something to which none of the other "I's" are likely to agree when the time has come for the fulfilment of the promise. Again, one group of "I's" in us happens to be interested in these ideas we are studying here, and may decide that it is very necessary to change, whereas others are not in the least interested in them and have no intention of

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changing anything at all. That is one of the difficulties you probably will have already noticed in your work, that you are seldom whole-hearted in anything you do, and the reason why you are not whole-hearted is that you are a plurality and not a unity. Man's name is legion.'

The first discovery I had made from self-observation was how quickly changes occurred within me, one mood giving place to another and in turn yielding precedence to another. Nor was it only feelings which altered rapidly. I had also seen how an idea to which I had fully subscribed previously was liable to become quite unacceptable to me a little later. I had had glimpses of these changes and gross inconsistencies in me previously, but until I came into the work I had interpreted them as meaning that there existed some central core within me which was subject to certain alterations of mood and opinion, but here was Ouspensky denying that there was anything central and permanent in me at all. According to him, the only thing I possessed of a durable nature was a name and a body, but was this a reasonable way of looking at things? After thinking the matter over carefully, I first came to the conclusion that it did not matter very much which of the two ways of looking at myself I accepted, but later decided that G's way corresponded better with the facts as I saw them, for whereas I had no proof at all of the existence within me of any permanent thing which underwent changes I had plenty of evidence of the existence in me of change itself.

Still later I realized that the idea that man possessed no permanent self but consisted only of change always had been and still was a very widely held idea and that one of the clearest formulations of this philosophy was to be found in the writings of that exceedingly perspicacious Scottish philosopher, David Hume. I looked up the passage in which he gives the account of his inability to find a permanent self (Book 1, Part IV, Section IV), and found that he had used it as an argument against Berkeley's claim that man possesses an intuitive knowledge of his own soul or self. 'For my part

when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself* I always stumble on some perception or other of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception. There may be philosophers [he ironically concludes] who can perceive their selves, but setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement.'

David Hume was a clear-sighted and unusually intelligent observer, and anyone who repeats his experiment with similar sincerity is likely to come to the same conclusions as he did. On closer examination, the thing which we have previously taken to be a 'self' always turns out to be nothing more than a sequence of perceptions, and surely this psychic procession within us, which never remains for one moment stationary but is always on the move, is quite unworthy of being accepted as a permanent self or soul. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility of something else more lasting, existing beneath all the superficial layer of psychic rubbish we call ourselves.

But what have our modern philosophers to say on the subject of Hume's denial of the existence of any 'self'? In his *History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell makes the following cautious and non-committal comment on it: 'It does not follow that there is no simple self; it only follows that we cannot know whether there is or not, and that the self, except as a "bundle" of perceptions, cannot enter into any part of our knowledge. This conclusion is important in metaphysics, as getting rid of the last surviving use of "substance". It is important in theology, as abolishing all supposed knowledge of the "soul". It is important to the analysis of knowledge, since it shows that the category of subject and object is not fundamental.' (Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*.)

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It must be borne in mind that Bertrand Russell is one of the philosophers — I quote his own words — ‘who confess frankly that the human intellect is unable to find conclusive answers to many questions of profound importance to mankind, but who refuse to believe that there is some “higher” way of knowing by which we can discover truths hidden from science and the intellect.’ In other words, Bertrand Russell bids us be content with science as our guide, and warns us against asking unanswerable questions, amongst them the question whether or not man possesses a self or a soul.

Ever since man was capable of thought he has been seeking to know what Bertrand Russell proclaims as unknowable, and he will continue to reach out for knowledge beyond his grasp long after the particularly narrow school of philosophy to which Russell belongs has passed into oblivion. And let us hope that he will never be content to live, as Russell would have him live, on the thin gruel of scientific knowledge alone, for in him has been placed a hunger for larger truths than those of science. Finally, let it be noted that everything in this book is opposed to Bertrand Russell’s assertion that there are no ways of knowing things other than by the way followed by the scientists.

A survey of the sacred books of the East shows us that the idea of the non-existence of any ‘self’ has been held by the Buddhists for thousands of years. To Buddhists, David Hume’s observations about the absence of anything a man can call a ‘self’ present no difficulty at all. On the contrary, Hume’s statement is entirely in line with their own teaching. Gautama Buddha is reputed to have said: ‘There are the petals, the pollen, the corolla and the stalk, but there is no lotus flower. There is this or that passing idea, this or that transitory emotion, this or that image but no organized whole behind them which can be called the ego, or the self.’

The Buddhist uses the two words, ‘ego’ and ‘self’, merely as convenient terms for describing a changing combination of both physical and psychic phenomena. He realizes that

everything within himself is dependent on something else and that nowhere is there anything which exists in its own right, independent and self-produced, unconnected with anything else — a veritable 'I'. This belief is illustrated by a Tibetan parable which gives an excellent account of the Buddhist's view of a person. Madame David-Neel narrates this parable, in her well-known work on Buddhism. 'A person', she writes, 'is an assembly composed of a number of members. In this assembly discussion never ceases. Now and again one of the members rises, makes a speech and suggests an action; his colleagues approve, and it is decided that what he has proposed shall be executed. Often several members of the assembly rise at the same time and propose different things, and each of them, for private reasons, supports his own proposal. It may happen that these differences of opinion, and the passion which each of the orators brings into the debate, will provoke a quarrel, even a violent quarrel, in the assembly. Fellow members may even come to blows. It also happens that some members of the assembly leave it of their own accord; others are pushed out and others again are expelled by force by their colleagues. All this time newcomers introduce themselves into the assembly, either by gently sidling in or by forcing the doors.' Such is man.

The parable gives a very full account of our inner state. It goes on to describe how many of the voices heard at the meeting become more feeble in the course of time, whilst others become stronger and bolder, shouting down all opposition and finally establishing their ascendancy over all rivals. 'These', comments Madame David-Neel, 'are our instincts, our tendencies, our ideas, our beliefs, our desires, etc. Through the causes which engendered it, each of them is the descendant and heir of many lines of causes, of many series of phenomena, going far back into the past, and whose traces are lost in the shadowy depths of eternity.' (Alexandre David-Neel, *Buddhism*.)

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life as a log is borne along by a river in flood, and that he was particularly at the mercy of the triple currents of *raga* (passion), *dosa* (anger) and *moha* (illusion). The term *nirvana* which is so constantly misunderstood by us Westerners really means the inner freedom which a man may eventually attain if, after prolonged struggle, he manages to disengage himself from all the compulsions and desires which formerly controlled him. In other words *nirvana* represents the fulfilment of the promise long ago given by Buddha to his disciples, the promise contained in the words: 'When thou hast understood the dissolution of all the fabrications, thou shalt understand that which is not fabricated'.

The similarity between Buddha's teaching and the ideas we were learning from Ouspensky was obviously a very close one. We had been told that impressions from without acted on us as a driving-belt acted on a lathe, and that if this propelling force were suddenly to cease and at the same time the memories of similar past impressions were to fade, we should be immobilized and quickly die. This implied that none of our activities came from ourselves, but that they were always the result of forces originating outside, so that they were reactions rather than actions. But what, someone asked, was the thing in us which went through the pantomime of deciding what we should do, the thing in ourselves which we had previously called our 'will'? Ouspensky replied that this so-called 'will' of ours was nothing more than the resultant of our various desires, and what made the situation more confusing was the fact that, whenever we did anything, we could always claim afterwards, and with correctness, that we had acted in accordance with what we had wanted to do. This was true, but it only put the motive force to which we were reacting a little further back. We had acted as our wishes had dictated, but we had had little or no say in the acquirement of these desires and this was entirely in keeping with the realistic teaching of Buddha that a man was the slave of his desires.



But to assert that man is moved by external forces, as a lathe is moved by the workshop driving-belt, does not necessarily exclude all possibility of choice for him. According to G's teaching, mechanical man does, in fact, possess a small measure of choice, so that he can choose to react to this or to that, but to call anything so restricted and so fleeting as this 'free will' is obviously absurd. So, also, when the question of man's will is looked at from a larger standpoint would it be absurd to imagine that Voltaire's little 'forked animal', living in a universe entirely governed by law, should be free to behave himself exactly as he pleased. Man, like the universe around him, is bound by laws and will always be bound by laws. Nevertheless he is able to choose to a limited, and to an ever-increasing extent, the influences under which he prefers to live.

Up till now Ouspensky had spoken to us very little about the universe, but at a previous meeting he had mentioned that man lived under a number of different influences reaching him from many different sources, such as the sun, the moon and the planets. He had said that G taught that all these influences acted on man simultaneously, one kind predominating at one moment, and another at another moment. Man could continue to react blindly as he had hitherto reacted to the various physiological drives and desires of his body, or if he saw the necessity for doing this he could begin to struggle with these blind urges and could seek to develop the higher parts of his nature. For man was a very complicated organism and so constituted that there were many different things in him belonging to different levels of being.

This statement about man evoked at a subsequent meeting the following question: 'How, if man is only a machine, can he have any choice in the matter?' Ouspensky answered this question by saying that although man was a machine there were certain weak places in his machinery where a certain amount of free play was possible between the various com-

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ponents of his mechanism, and it was in these weak places that a struggle to obtain control of himself could begin with some prospect of success. I have never found Ouspensky's metaphor of weak places in machinery at which work can start a very satisfactory one and prefer another one, borrowed I believe from Spinoza, and adapted to serve my own purposes. I picture myself as seated in a frail canoe which is being swept down a great river in the company of many similar canoes. I see myself taking careful note of the numerous eddies and currents of the river, and coming to some sort of decision as to the direction in which I want to travel. Then, having reached this decision, I imagine myself struggling, with the help of a small paddle, to nose my canoe into a current which I believe to be more favourable to this aim. I am quite aware of the fact that I shall inevitably be swept onwards by the river towards the sea, but I hope that by taking advantage of certain currents I shall travel more as I prefer to travel and I do not entirely exclude the possibility that what I am doing may make some difference as to my final destination.

The idea that man is compounded of many different principles, and that his real life function is to discover the god-like principle in his nature and to live in conformity with its laws is to be found in all the great religions. The chief difference between the various religions is with regard to the nature of this higher principle in man. As has already been said, the Buddhist denies the existence in man of any separate self and argues that the only principle which he, personally, could accept as being real would be a homogeneous and self-engendered self entirely independent of an external cause. Continuing this line of argument, the Buddhist adds that, to be satisfying, a 'self' would have to be 'eternal', for otherwise, if it had come into existence at a certain moment of time, it must have originated from some cause, and consequently could not be accepted as self-engendered.

But there are other views on this important subject and Shankara, the great Hindu commentator on the Vedanta, avoids all extremes and begins with the bold statement that the 'self' is both known and unknown. 'We know', he says, 'that the "self" exists but we do not know what it is. Nor can we ever hope to know the "self" by means of *thought*, since thought is part of the flux of psychic states belonging to the region of the non-self.' He then advises those who feel the need for some sort of idea of the self to picture it in terms of pure, undifferentiated consciousness, a consciousness which remains unaffected, even when the body has been reduced to ashes and the mind has completely disappeared.

As I see it, G's view of the self comes very close to, even if it does not coincide with, this Vedantist view of it. At any rate a description of the 'self' in terms of undifferentiated consciousness is the only description which I personally am able to accept at the present time. Whenever I turn my attention inwards and start to look for a 'self', I see what the Buddhist sees, namely a procession of perceptions, ideas and emotions which come and go, and which are never there for very long. Like David Hume, I never catch anything which I can call my 'I'. I can, of course, make a list of all the things I have seen as the result of self-observation, and can decide that all the thoughts and emotions of which I approve belong to my real self, whilst all the mean and shabby things I have noticed belong to my imaginary 'I', or my false personality, but this is obviously cheating. I have no right to appropriate all the noble things in myself and to discard all the mean, for they are all equally part of the highly complex creature known to the world as Kenneth Walker.

'There come seasons, meditative, sweet, yet awful hours, when in wonder and fear you ask yourself that unanswerable question: Who am I; the thing that can say "I"? The world, with its loud traffickings, retires into the distance; and through the paper hangings and stone walls, and thick-plied tissues of Commerce and Polity, and all the living and lifeless

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integuments (of Society and a Body) wherewith your Existence sits surrounded — the sight reaches into the void Deep, and you are alone with the Universe, and silently commune with it, as one mysterious Presence with another.' So wrote Carlyle, and it is obvious from the account he gives of his meditation that he succeeded in penetrating only one of the several layers which separate him from the greater 'Self'. He managed for a moment or two to get past the noisy layer of the world's and his own loud traffickings and to reach a quieter part of his being, but in the end it was only his own troublesome voice that he heard talking for he continues his reverie thus: 'Who am I: what is this Me? A Voice, a Motion, an Appearance; some embodied, visualized Idea in the Eternal Mind? *Cogito, ergo sum*. Alas, poor Cogitator, this takes us but a little way. Sure enough, I am; and lately was not; but Whence? How? Whereto?'

Carlyle was right at any rate in his conclusion that the thinker within us takes us only a little way. What he failed to understand was that it was this same restless thinker and talker which brought his self-remembering to an end and prevented him from learning anything more. There is a striking and highly significant difference between Carlyle's, the thinker's, and Tennyson's, the poet's, accounts of self-remembering. At the moment that Carlyle is starting to theorize about the nature of the self, Tennyson is making the age-old discovery that for Truth to appear the self of everyday life has to be dissolved in something immeasurably greater than itself.

. . . and yet no shadow of doubt  
But with clearness and through loss of self  
The gain of such large life as matched with ours  
Were Sun to spark, unshadowable in words,  
Themselves but shadows of a shadow.

At that moment of larger life, pure unformulated experience displaced thought in Tennyson and only afterwards was he able to find the words with which to describe what had

happened. Had that busybody 'cogitator' intervened at too early a moment, as it did in the case of Carlyle, everything would have been lost. All the great mystics call attention to the fact that the continuous turning of thought in the head is one of the greatest obstacles to the contemplative life. Jacob Boehme's instructions to the novice are couched in the language of religion, but they might equally well be given to a person who is trying to self-remember. He writes that the chief difficulty will come from associative thinking and the desires and requirements of the 'self' of everyday life or what he terms 'the willing of self'. 'When thou standest still from the thinking of self and the willing of self; when both the intellect and will are quiet and passive to the impressions of the Eternal World and Spirit; and when thy soul is winged up, and above what is temporal, the outward senses, and the imagination being locked up by holy abstraction, then the eternal hearing, seeing and speaking will be revealed to thee. . . . Since it is nought indeed but thine own hearing and willing that do hinder thee, so that thou dost not see and hear God.' (*The Signature of All Things*.)

The most exact accounts of the search for the Self are, however, those given by Eastern writers who liken the human mind to the waters of a lake and the seeker of the greater self to a man peering into the depths of the lake. According to the Vedantist philosopher the mind has no intelligence or consciousness of its own but borrows these from the near-by Atman or divine principle within man, in the same way that a crystal may borrow colour from the proximity of a rose-coloured object. Whenever an event or object in the external world is recorded within us by the special senses, a *vritti*, or thought-wave, is said to be raised in our minds, and our small ego-sense (*Ahankara* in Sanscrit) immediately identifies itself with this. We feel 'happy' if the thought-wave which the external event has raised within us happens to be of a pleasant nature and unhappy if it happens to be unpleasant. But the real Self or Atman remains aloof from all these

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disturbances of the mind since the Atman is by its very nature enlightened and free. It follows therefore that we shall never be able to know our real Selves so long as we are identified with the ego-sense and with the thought-waves by which we are ordinarily governed. It is only when we manage to free ourselves from these disturbances and when the ruffled surface of the water becomes sufficiently calm that we shall be able to discover what lies down there in the clear depths of the lake.

Knowledge of this larger Self is *direct* knowledge as opposed to the indirect knowledge gained through the agency of the reason and the special senses. Being pure experience it is beyond the range of argument, though arguments may subsequently arise when we are struggling to explain what has happened.

Sometimes and seemingly by accident, conditions are more favourable than usual for self-remembering and when this happens and I draw near to the stillness of the centre I become more and more convinced that something much more permanent awaits me there just beyond my reach. Yet, as I get a little closer to what I am seeking, I encounter a surprise, for instead of discovering, as I had expected to do, an unmistakable 'I' lying there in the untroubled depths, I find myself slowly disappearing into a Nameless Entity immeasurably greater than myself. To claim that this higher realm of pure consciousness, bliss and being in which I am lost is myself would be preposterous and yet I am of it and it is of me. It is to this infinite realm of light, consciousness and bliss that the Vedantist refers when he makes use of the word *Sachidananda*. Who am I; the thing that can say 'I'? Surely this is the biggest question a man can ever put to himself.

What will my friends the psychological experts make of this description of another state of being of which Western psychology has nothing at all to say? Will my Jungian colleagues explain it as a sudden uprush of the Collective Unconscious into my own separate consciousness? Will my

Freudian friends offer me a still less attractive interpretation of what I have experienced? I am not very deeply concerned with the way in which my words will be interpreted but if it were necessary for me to find some sort of scientific support for them I should not be at a loss. I should refer my critics to a physicist of international fame. Schrödinger writes: 'Consciousness is never experienced in the plural, only in the singular. . . . How does the idea of plurality (so emphatically opposed by the Upanishad writers) arise at all? Consciousness finds itself intimately connected with and dependent on this physical state of a limited region of matter, the body. . . . Now there is a great plurality of similar bodies. Hence the pluralization of consciousness of minds seems a very suggestive hypothesis. Probably all simple, ingenuous people, as well as the great majority of Western philosophers have accepted it. . . . The only possible alternative is simply to keep the immediate experience that consciousness is a singular of which the plural is unknown; that there is only one thing and that what seems to be a plurality is merely a series of different aspects of this one thing produced by a deception (the Indian *Maya*); the same illusion is produced in a gallery of mirrors, and in the same way Gaurisankar and Mt. Everest turn out to be the same peak seen from different valleys.' (E. Schrödinger, *What is Life?*) The *Bhagavad Gita* sums this up in the words: 'Indivisible, but as if divided in beings'.

The approach to knowledge by way of the reason and the inner senses has brought invaluable results in our examination of the world outside ourselves but it is useless in our present study of the inner world of consciousness and the Self. Aurobindo gives his powerful support to this view for he writes: 'So long as we confine ourselves to sense-evidence and the physical consciousness we can conceive nothing and know nothing except the material world and its phenomena. But certain faculties in us enable our mentality to arrive at conceptions which we may indeed deduce by ratiocination or by

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It is fortunate that there exists in us these other faculties capable of correcting the errors made by the sense-mind and of opening up new vistas of truth. It was to them that the maker of the Katha Upanishad was probably referring when he declared: 'This secret Self in all beings is not apparent but it is seen by means of the supreme reason, the subtle, by those who have the subtle vision.'



## CHAPTER VI

### ESSENCE AND PERSONALITY

COUSPENSKY drew our attention to another division of G's not to be found in any Western system of psychology. It was his separation of man into two parts: Essence and Personality. Essence comprised everything with which a man was born and which could be called his own, whilst Personality was what he acquired by upbringing and education. Essence included a man's physical and psychological constitution and all that he had inherited from his parents in the way of potentialities and tendencies. Personality was made up of what he subsequently learned, and this embraced all his acquired tastes, likes and dislikes. Even his instinctive likes and dislikes, which were based on what was good for him and what was bad for him, became coloured in time by the whims of his personality. This was because Personality grew very rapidly, and dominated Essence at such an early age that the latter ceased to develop, with the consequence that a middle-aged man might possess only the Essence of a child of seven.

An infant had no Personality at all, and everything in him was real and his own, but as soon as education started, his Personality began to grow. He learnt to imitate the grown-ups around him, adopting many of their likes and dislikes and copying their methods of displaying their negative emotions. Some of the traits in the growing child's personality might arise not so much from imitation of the adults in charge of him as from his resistance to their methods of training him, and from his attempts to conceal from them things in his own Essence which were more genuine for him. In later years of

childhood, after he had learned to read, a whole new world of people on which to model himself was open to him, and his Personality learnt to be still more elaborate and complicated. And this was yet another difference between Personality and Essence: that whereas Essence was simple, crude and straightforward in behaviour, Personality was so complex that it deceived even itself. For example, a man might genuinely deceive himself into believing that he was a great philanthropist prepared to sacrifice himself entirely for the good of his fellow men and yet have no real feeling for humanity, but desire only to dominate other people.

The relationship between Personality and Essence was sometimes difficult to unravel. For example, a woman might appear to be a very involved, sophisticated creature who was always clamouring for attention, and yet in her Essence she could be quite a simple person. Sometimes Personality and Essence were opposed to each other so that the life of the individual was made difficult and unhappy. Yet it would be a mistake to take all this too simply and to regard Essence as the ill-treated hero, dominated by the villain of the human drama, Personality, for there was much in a man's essence which was primitive, crude and even savage, and a great deal in his personality which was praiseworthy and desirable. 'Personality', continued Ouspensky, 'is a very necessary part of a man, without which it would be impossible for him to live a satisfactory life. What is required for man's development is not that his personality should be eliminated, but that it should be rendered much less active than it is. Essence will then be enabled to grow and, as essence is the more genuine part of a man, this is a very necessary preliminary to his development.'

Ouspensky said that G had once described various ways in which Personality and Essence could be separated from each other artificially. He said that drugs, hypnotism and certain special exercises were used in Esoteric schools for this very purpose. For example, there were certain narcotics which

possessed the property of putting Personality to sleep for a time without affecting Essence at all, so that Essence alone manifested itself. The result of experiments of this kind might be that a man who was usually full of ideas, sympathies, antipathies and strong convictions, was found to be quite indifferent to all these things in his Essence. Ideas for which he would previously have been prepared to die now appeared ridiculous to him, and quite unworthy of his attention. All that he showed after taking the narcotic were certain instinctive leanings, such as a desire for warmth, a childish delight in sweets and a strong disinclination for any form of physical exertion. The narcotic revealed how immature was the more real part of him.

Personality was usually more highly developed in town-dwellers and in extremely intellectual people than it was in people who worked on the land for their living. 'And instinctively one feels that country folk are more genuine people,' added Ouspensky, 'as indeed they are. They are people in whom Personality has got less out of hand and in whom Essence is more active so that they speak and act more often from themselves. It is very important to realize two things, that a man's Personality has been entirely shaped by the external world, and that it is put into motion by the driving-belt action of external events. A man imagines himself to be free, but he is far from being free. Whatever he does is the result of external events acting on the kind of personality he happens to have acquired by similar means. He may have acquired a very noble personality, but should the shaping and restraining influences of his life be suddenly removed, so that it no longer matters to him what people say or think of him, then he can reveal himself as very far from being noble. This means that not only has his nobility been produced by external circumstance, but that it is maintained by the same means.'

At another meeting Ouspensky again emphasized the fact that Personality was a very necessary part of us. 'We have to

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prepare ourselves for some profession or business in life,' he said, 'and what we acquire in this preparation is part of our personality. A person who has not equipped himself properly in this way is not likely to be a good householder, and consequently he is unsuitable for this work.' Ouspensky then reminded us, also, of what he had said at a much earlier meeting: that humanity could be divided into the three categories of good householders, tramps and lunatics. A good householder was a machine, but he was a machine capable of assuming certain responsibilities and a machine on which other people could depend. A tramp was a man who was incapable of completing any undertaking in life, who always abandoned what he had begun. A lunatic was without any discrimination at all, a man who embarked first on this enterprise and then on that one, and who never attained any goal. Only good householders were able to obtain any profit from the work we were now engaged on.

At another meeting Ouspensky said that as Essence was the more real part of us, it was only from Essence that anything real and new could arise, such as a controlling and permanent 'I'. But, for this to happen, Personality had to become more passive and Essence had to grow. In order that Essence should grow it had to be fed, and its food took the form of a new kind of knowledge, such as that which we were now receiving. The situation was further complicated by the fact that this knowledge could only reach Essence through Personality. So the sequence of events for a man who was developing was as follows: first his Personality had to grow at the expense of Essence; then his Personality had to be rendered more passive; and finally Essence had to learn from Personality how to grow. Growth in Essence was always the result of understanding and this had to start in Personality for we were unable to reach Essence directly.

Ouspensky pointed out that for quite a long time the division of man into Essence and Personality would be only of theoretical value to us, since we should be unable to

distinguish between what belonged to the one and what belonged to the other. He advised us for the present to assign everything we saw in ourselves to Personality, and to accept the fact that very little in us came from Essence.

There was another division of man which would be of much greater practical use to us, namely the division between the observing 'I' in us and the thing which the observing 'I' saw, namely, Ouspensky, Robinson, Walker or whoever the person happened to be. He said that all of us who were really working were made up of two entirely different characters, the person who still went about the world calling himself 'I' and believing himself to be a unity, and the small but much more real part of us which looked on and saw through the pretences of the other part. This gap between 'I', known to the Vedantist as the witness, and Ouspensky, Robinson and Walker could be felt, and it was a very real gap. 'Yet', said Ouspensky, 'a very subtle danger lurks even in these vital moments of "separation"'. Although a real observing "I" has been there at the start, the process may be continued by something which is quite different, and instead of there being true self-observation there may only be Ouspensky, Robinson and Walker dreaming about themselves at work. We should keep a sharp look-out for this crafty substitution of the false for the genuine.'

This experience of what Ouspensky called 'separation' — that is to say, the emotional realization of the gap which exists between the observing 'I' and everything included under the heading Kenneth Walker — became of greater and greater importance to me with the passage of time. At first, self-observation meant very little more than one or two 'I's in me which were interested in the work, catching sight of other 'I's in me which were not in the least interested in it, but gradually the nature of the 'observer' changed, so that he seemed to be standing on a slightly different level than the rest of me. And this was as it should be, for 'self-observation' is on the way to self-remembering, and to self-remember

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means to be less asleep than one usually is. At a still later stage the character of the observing 'I' seemed to alter again, and all this was in keeping with a parable which Ouspensky had given us at one of the earliest meetings. It was the story of a house in which there lived neither master nor overseer; but only a rabble of servants, each of whom claimed to be the master of the house. All of the servants were in the wrong places, the cook in the garden, the gardener in the kitchen, the butler in the stable and so on. The result was complete disorder in the house, and this eventually became so great that a few of the more sensible of the servants decided that something had to be done about it. They agreed therefore to elect and to obey, first a deputy steward and then a real steward, for the purpose of getting the house ready for the eventual return of the master. What was of great interest to me about this parable was that the makers of it had found it necessary to obtain a number of symbols for the different stages of the organization of the house. First came the realization, on the part of a few of the more sensible servants, that it was impossible to continue living as they were living, then the agreement between them to elect and obey a deputy steward, and then the election of a superior organizer called a real steward. The detailed character of the parable clearly indicated that its makers had themselves experienced a number of different stages which required illustration, and it was reassuring to me to know that the path we were trying to follow had been so carefully charted by those who had trodden it long ago.

Ouspensky said that G had given an alternative parable to that of the house in disorder. It was a still more ancient allegory, which likened man to an equipage made up of a horse, carriage, driver and master. The carriage represented man's body, and the driver was his mind. The carriage was connected with the horse by means of the shafts, and the driver with the horse by the reins, and, according to G, work on oneself always had to begin with work on the driver —

that is to say, with work on the mind. The first thing necessary was that the driver should wake up, hear his master's voice and be capable of following his instructions. He must then learn, what he had hitherto neglected to learn, the right way to drive a horse, how to feed it and how to harness it properly to the carriage. It was also important that he should keep everything to do with the horse and the carriage in excellent working order. The horse represented the emotions, and hitherto the horse had pulled the whole outfit wherever it liked, but now the driver had to control its movements by means of the reins, and in accordance with his master's instructions. Only then would the carriage begin to move in a straight line instead of meandering about in circles. But whether this happened or not depended first on the driver's hearing his master's voice, and second on whether the horse had been properly harnessed, and above all on whether the driver possessed reins with which to control the horse's movements.

Ouspensky said that the symbolism of the reins in this parable was of particular importance, since the reins stood for the means by which the mind was able to control the emotions. 'But how can Intellectual Centre manage to control Emotional Centre?' he asked us. 'The horse does not understand the driver's language because the driver uses words and the emotional centre expresses itself not in words but in symbols. We know only too well that it is useless for us to say to ourselves before a difficult interview, "I shall refuse to be irritated by this fellow whatever he says to me, because irritation does not serve my purposes". Reasoning with ourselves in this way will have no effect at all, for our emotions often behave quite irrationally. We react to annoyances as we have always reacted to them, whatever we may have said to ourselves beforehand. No, talking will have no effect on the horse, and in our customary state of waking-sleep there are no reins at all between the driver and the horse. It is only in the higher state of self-remembering that

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we are able to exercise any control over our mechanical reactions and our emotions. In our usual state of sleep we are drivers who possess no reins with which to control their horses.' (See also page 150.)

Ouspensky told us that since our personalities determined our thoughts, our feelings and our actions, it was very necessary that we should make an intensive study of them. And what fantastic things these personalities were when we managed to catch sight of them. Madame Ouspensky, who took a more and more prominent part in her husband's work after the year 1924, possessed a special gift for seeing below the surface and revealing to us what she had discovered there. She sometimes likened our personalities to large hot-air pies which we were carrying about with us very carefully in the hope that they would be duly admired. Her allegory was a particularly appropriate one, for the crust of a hot-air pie is so thin that the slightest knock from someone else will cause it to crumble, and thus reveal to the world the emptiness within. Aware of this danger, we are constantly on our guard, protecting our personalities from all rough handling, insisting always that we are in the right and others in the wrong, and justifying our every action, thought and feeling.

To have to be always right and — what is still more exacting — to have to prove oneself always right to the world, is a fatiguing and a whole-time job, and the realization that both of these obligations are entirely unnecessary brings with it an immediate sense of relief. Not that our personalities ceased to trouble us after we had realized their unimportance. No, they continued to control us as they did before, but we were able to enjoy moments of unaccustomed peace and quiet, moments when 'the observer' in us was there, and when the noisy actors in our inner theatres were compelled to retire from the centre of the stage and to creep off shamefacedly into the wings. And at such times of inner 'separation' we caught a glimpse of what it would be like to be real



masters of ourselves, and to be in control of the erratic actors within us.

In one of his many talks on the subject of Personality, Ouspensky drew our attention to the fact that we possessed a number of different roles which were automatically assumed for different social occasions and with different kinds of people. For example, there was a role which appeared when we were at home in the evening within the family circle, another which replaced it when we reached the office or other scene of our day's work, yet another which slipped into place when we were dining out with friends, and also different roles for use with inferiors and with superiors. Yet, because a man's repertoire of roles was limited, he was liable to find himself without one in unusual circumstances and the lack of an appropriate role always made him feel very uncomfortable. So also was a man distressed when two different roles clashed with each other, as when a bachelor friend with whom he has been accustomed to dine at his club, turns up by accident within the family circle. It was also confusing to a man to have to play two contradictory roles in the same company, changing rapidly from one to the other.

Again it is William James alone who has realized the importance of the roles which take charge of us in different circumstances and with different people. He writes: 'We do not show ourselves to our children as to our club companions, to our customers as to the labourers we employ, to our masters and employers as to our intimate friends.' He also saw that many of these roles are incompatible with each other, and that they often are only products of our imaginations. 'Not that I would not,' he continues, 'if I could, be both handsome and fat and well-dressed, and a great athlete and make a million a year, be a wit, a *bon vivant* and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher, a philanthropist, statesman, warrior and African explorer, as well as a "tone poet" and a saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's

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work would run counter to the saint's; the *bon vivant* and the philanthropist would trip each other up. . . . So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation.'

But William James is mistaken when he suggests that it is possible to pick out a desirable 'self' from the crowd, cultivate it and turn all the others out. Crowds are notably difficult to control and the crowd within us is no exception to this rule. We possess no central and permanent 'I' whom the others will obey, so who is capable of making this selection and of issuing orders for the dismissal of all the undesirable characters? William James is postulating something which does not exist in us, a leader. The inner crowd obeys no one, but runs itself by itself in the haphazard way in which leaderless crowds do run themselves, shouting one thing at one moment and doing precisely the opposite thing immediately afterwards. It is this which explains the many inconsistencies and contradictions in our behaviour. 'Why on earth did I promise to do that?' I ask myself, when I wake up in the morning and recall the conversation of the evening before. 'I can't think what induced me to commit myself to doing anything so foolish. I'll ring up immediately and say that the whole thing is off.'

Ouspensky said that the study of roles was a very important part of our work of self-observation, and he recommended us sometimes to place ourselves deliberately in unusual circumstances for which we were without any suitable role. Although this might well be an uncomfortable experience, it would provide us with an excellent opportunity for seeing things of very great importance.

Ouspensky spoke also of another part of Personality's intricate machinery to which he gave the name of 'buffers'. Buffers were ingenious contrivances by which the shock resulting from one railway carriage bumping against another railway carriage was lessened, and he said that precisely similar mechanisms may exist between different parts of a

man's personality. Life would become unbearable for a man if he were to be continually aware of the many inconsistencies and contradictions within him and, in order to lessen the risk of this, he had created within himself a number of blind spots which prevented him from seeing the conflicts going on between his multitudinous 'I's. These blind spots or buffers deadened jars and helped him to continue sleeping in comfort, dreaming that all was well with him, and that he had no need to be otherwise than completely satisfied with himself. 'Buffers', concluded Ouspensky, 'are appliances by means of which we can always feel ourselves to be right.'

'Are they justifications?' someone asked him.

'They may be, but a man with really strong buffers does not see any need to justify himself, for he is quite unaware of any inconsistencies within him, and accepts himself as entirely satisfactory as he is. Such a man has complete confidence in himself and all that he stands for.'

'What is the best way of seeing buffers?' another person asked.

'The time always comes', replied Ouspensky, 'when our work on ourselves begins to reveal some of our inconsistencies. We know that a buffer is placed between these, and with practice in self-observation we slowly become aware of what lies on both sides of the buffer. So be on the look-out for inner contradictions, and these will lead you to the discovery of buffers. Pay particular attention to any subject on which you are touchy. You have perhaps attributed to yourself some good quality, and that is an idea which lies on one side of the buffer, but you have not as yet seen clearly the contradiction which lies on the other side of it. Nevertheless you are a little bit uncomfortable about this good quality, and that may mean that you are in the neighbourhood of a buffer.'

At another meeting Ouspensky talked about Chief Feature. He said that there was a central feature around which everything in a man revolved. It was really his chief weakness, and it explained a great deal in his personality. One man talked

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too much when he ought to be silent, and another man remained silent when he ought to talk, and this showed how teaching in this work could never be other than individual. He said that the discovery of one's chief weakness and the struggle against it was an important part of the work, but that Chief Feature was so carefully protected by buffers that a man was seldom able to discover it by himself. He had to be told his Chief Weakness, but he must not be told it too soon, or he would refuse to believe what he had been told. He would deny the accusation, and the more stoutly he denied it the more likely it would be that the diagnosis was a correct one.

'Is there any way in which we can discover the direction in which our Chief Feature lies?' someone asked.

'If you can look at the pattern of your whole life,' answered Ouspensky, 'you may be able to see the same sort of problem continually recurring in it and ending in the same sort of *impasse*. If you manage to do this, you are likely to be in the neighbourhood of your Chief Feature. Understand that your Chief Feature is an axis in yourself around which a great many other things are revolving, and that explains why the fruits of your chief weakness are continually recurring. But few people discover for themselves their chief feature.'

Someone asked if there were any one fault in Personality which was a greater obstacle to inner development than anything else. Ouspensky replied without hesitation that vanity was an outstanding hindrance. He said that G had always laid special emphasis on the importance of vanity and had used these words about it: 'The fundamental cause of almost all the misunderstandings arising in the inner world of man . . . is chiefly due to the psychic factor found in man's being at an early age, and due to wrong education, the stimulation of which gives birth in him to the impulse of vanity. . . . I affirm solemnly that the happiness and self-consciousness — that is to say, self-remembering — which should be in a real man, depend, in most cases, almost exclusively on the

*absence* in him of feelings of vanity. And I have made it my aim in working with my people to deal mercilessly with all manifestations of this factor which hinder development and prevent any genuine relationship to our inner life, on whose harmonious adjustment all true happiness depends.' Ouspensky advised us, therefore, to be on the look-out for our special forms of vanity, for we all had our own pet conceits.

A newcomer asked how our special vanities could be found? 'By self-observation,' he replied, 'by continuing to do what you ought all to be doing now, taking many snapshots of yourself. These will reveal to you in time all your ingrained attitudes, all the habits of thought and feeling which go to make up *you*. And when you come to lay out all these photographs for inspection, you may find that many of them come together, quite naturally, in groups, so that you begin to see the portraits of a number of sub-personalities in yourselves; a budding cinema star, perhaps, a badly misunderstood person, or a martyr, a rebel or a snob. When you have seen these minor characters in yourselves, it is good to give them names and become more and more familiar with them.' Only then will you gain any control over them.

I took Ouspensky's advice, and five years later the three sub-personalities I had discovered in myself — Black Hawk, Knight-Paton and the Personage — were used as material for the writing of a new form of autobiography. It was published under the title *I Talk of Dreams*. Black Hawk, Knight-Paton and the Personage are still there within me, but they trouble me now less and less.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE TWO GREAT COSMIC LAWS

SOMEONE asked why it was so difficult for us to change anything in ourselves, why we failed so often to step aside from negative emotions and why it was so hard to self-remember. 'Because', replied Ouspensky, 'it is against Nature to do all these things — they are quite unnatural. To make such efforts means going against the whole main current of events in our world. Moreover, you have got to remember that we live in a very unfavourable quarter of the Universe. Things which can be done quite easily in some parts of the Universe are very difficult to do here. The time has now come for us to study these things. So far we have been investigating man, but man cannot be properly understood unless we study at the same time the world in which man lives, for man is a small model of the Universe, a microcosm in macrocosm. He is made out of the same materials, and governed by the same laws. When we study the fundamental laws which regulate everything, it is sometimes easier to find examples of their working in ourselves and sometimes in the Universe. The study of man and the Universe should therefore proceed simultaneously, and already questions have been asked which could not be answered properly without knowing more about the world in which we live. We must turn now therefore to the Universe and give it our attention.

'We shall begin', he continued, 'by examining two great cosmic laws known as the Law of Three and the Law of Seven. The first of these laws can be formulated as follows: all phenomena, on every scale, from the sub-atomic to the cosmic, are the result of the meeting and the interaction of

three principles or forces. Scientists recognize the presence of two opposing forces in many phenomena, such as the existence of positive and negative electricity in physics and of male and female cells in biology, but they do not see that the presence of these two forces constitutes a general law. They are still further from realizing that the existence of a third force is necessary for the occurrence of phenomena, for, according to G's teaching, nothing can happen without the intervention of a third principle or force. If two forces only come together, nothing occurs.<sup>1</sup>

Ouspensky told us that this idea that three forces are necessary for anything new to happen was to be found in many ancient teachings. It was the original source from which was derived the Christian doctrine of the co-existent and indivisible Trinity, and it appeared in another form in the Hindu teaching concerning the creation of the Universe. From Brahman the Absolute arose Ishwara the Creator, and through the joint action of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva (the three different aspects of Ishwara) there was produced everything that exists. A still clearer statement of the law of three was to be found in the Sankya doctrine of the three *gunas*: *raja*, *tamas* and *sattva*. According to the Sankya philosophy, different combinations of these three principles, each with its characteristic quality, accounted for everything existing in the phenomenal world.

Ouspensky said that the three forces were called by G active, passive and neutralizing respectively, but he added that these were only names to indicate a relationship existing between them at a given moment, for all of these forces could be active in certain circumstances. It was comparatively easy to see the existence of the first two forces, active and passive, but the third force was far less often open to observation. This was because at the level of consciousness on which

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle also declared that 'all things are three and that three is everywhere; for as the Pythagoreans say the all and all things are determined by the number three'.

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FIG. 2

we lived we saw neither the Universe nor ourselves as they really were, but only as they appeared to us to be in our state of waking-sleep. In other words, we were third-force blind. By studying ourselves carefully, however, we should be able to find examples of the action in us of the three forces. And he gave us as one instance of this our desire to change. This desire could be regarded as active force in us, but it immediately came up against all the resistance of old habits and against our innate dislike of effort, which was second or passive force in us. Without a third force these two opposing forces counterbalanced each other or revolved around each other so that nothing happened. Then perhaps a third or neutralizing force appeared in the form of new knowledge and the learning of a special technique for bringing about a change, and with the help of this third force something might now begin to happen.

Ouspensky rose from his chair, walked over to the blackboard and drew on it a new diagram which he said represented no less an event than the creation of the Universe. He called his diagram the Ray of Creation, and said that the work of creation started in the Absolute, and that the three forces within the Absolute possessed unique qualities. Unlike three forces elsewhere, they possessed will, full consciousness and understanding, and this allowed them first to separate and then to reunite at a predetermined point, and there to give rise to the first series of worlds in the Ray

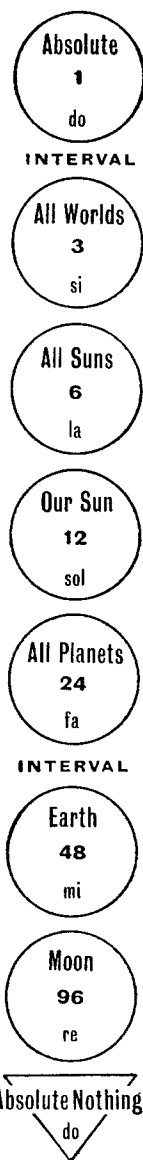


FIG. 2—The Ray of Creation to which the earth belongs.



of Creation. This first series of worlds would be called All Possible Worlds (see Fig. 2). In each of these newly created worlds there also existed three forces which repeated the process of interacting on each other, but because they only formed a part of the Absolute, and not the whole of it, they did not possess the will, consciousness and understanding possessed by their predecessors. This being so, their meeting point was accidental and not predetermined. This meant that whilst the will of the Absolute created and controlled the first series of worlds, it did not govern the subsequent stages of the creative work, and the farther the Ray of Creation travelled away from the Absolute, the more accidental and mechanical did the creation and the control of the created worlds become.

Ouspensky explained that the Ray which he was drawing on the board was only one of a vast number of Rays of Creation travelling outwards in all directions from the initial creative impulse in the Absolute. We were studying this Ray because it happened to be the Ray in which we were specially interested, our Earth being the sixth of the series of worlds marked on it. Enumerated outwards from the initial creative impulse, the series was as follows. First came the Absolute, and next All Possible Worlds. Under this term All Possible Worlds were included all the great stellar galaxies and the nebulae lying outside the Milky Way, as well as the Milky Way itself. The next world in the Ray was made up of all the suns in the Milky Way, followed in due course first by the world of our Sun, then by the world of the planets revolving round our Sun, then by the world of the particular planet in which we lived — namely, the Earth — and finally by the world of the Moon.

Ouspensky drew our attention to the fact that the Ray of Creation contradicted certain modern scientific ideas about the Universe, first because it looked upon the Universe as being a living thing, and second, because it regarded it as a living thing which was still growing. Science, or at any rate the science prevalent at that moment, regarded the Universe

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as something which had started very long ago and was now in process of running down and coming to an end. According to this view, the Moon was already dead, and the Earth was also slowly losing its heat, so that in time it could come to resemble the Moon. But the system we were studying took the opposite view, and regarded the Moon as in the course of becoming warmer and of preparing for the time when it would resemble the Earth, and the Earth would resemble the Sun.

Ouspensky also made a great point of the fact that the various worlds marked in the Ray were not moving about independently of each other in a vast wilderness of empty space, but that everything in the Universe was much more closely connected with everything else than we imagined it to be. Moreover, the intervals of space between the various worlds were very far from being empty. Energy was everywhere streaming down the Ray and was being absorbed by the various worlds it met in its course, to be liberated again later on in some altered form. In other words, a great interchange of energies was taking place everywhere, the planets receiving energy from the Sun, the Earth from the planets, and the Moon from the Earth. Energy was passing also in an upward direction from the Earth to the other planets, and thence onwards towards the Sun and the Milky Way.

The last way of looking at the Universe was to picture it as a wilderness of space in which a comparatively few solid bodies were moving about. Space should be thought of instead as a vast network of vibrations which radiated in every direction, a network in which a condensation of energy into matter was taking place at various points. But it was the radiations which were the primary entities of the Universe, and the series of worlds into which they had condensed which were the secondary concretions.

Having provided us with this immense scale example of the working of the Law of Three, Ouspensky passed on to a description of the second of the two great cosmic laws, the Law of Seven. He said that the immense network of vibra-

tions constituting the Universe could be used also to illustrate the action of the Law of Seven, a law which was often referred to as the law of octaves. Vibrations took place in all sorts of frequency and in all densities of matter, from the very finest matter down to the very coarsest. These vibrations could be visualized as travelling in all directions, crossing each other, colliding with each other, reinforcing each other, deflecting each other and opposing each other. Western thought differed radically from the thought of the system on the subject of the manner in which these radiations developed. According to Western thought, they developed without any breaks or interruptions, continuing their course in a certain direction for as long as the original impulse which had given rise to them was sufficiently strong to overcome the resistance of the medium in which they were travelling. The principle of the *continuity* of vibrations was therefore firmly established in the West, but this was contrary to G's teaching, which proclaimed the contrary principle of the *discontinuity* of vibrations. According to this idea, no vibrations, whether they belonged to an ascending or to a descending octave, developed uniformly, but always with accelerations or retardations at certain points. Another way of stating this cosmic principle would be to say that the force of an original impulse did not act uniformly throughout the whole process to which it had given rise, but slowed down at certain stages of it, so that ascending vibrations began to ascend more slowly and descending octaves to descend more slowly at these points. After these temporary phases of retardation of the process of development, the vibrations resumed their former speed of acceleration or retardation, as the case might be, until they encountered the next check, when the same phenomenon of diminished acceleration or retardation happened again.

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which corresponded to the doubling or to the halving of their frequency. Ouspensky gave as an example of this doubling or halving an increase in the rate of vibration of from one thousand a second to two thousand a second. When we examined the development of vibrations in this period more carefully, we found two places in which a retardation of the rate of acceleration occurred, one near the beginning of the process and the other almost at the end of it. According to G, the laws which governed the periodic retardations of the rate of increase or of diminution of the rate of vibrations were known to scientists in very ancient times, and they decided to record their discovery in the form of a seven-tone musical scale. The period of the doubling or of the halving of the rate of vibration now represents, therefore, the musical octave, and if we made use of the tonic-solfa scale, we could say that the first check in an ascending octave occurred between the notes *mi* and *fa*, and the second between *si* and the note *doh* of the succeeding octave. G called these two places in the octave, where a slowing down occurred in the rate either of acceleration or of retardation, the 'intervals' of the octave. He said that they could be looked upon as being weak spots in the octave, where it was liable either to be arrested or else to be deflected in an entirely new direction. Both of these accidents were avoided if fresh energy was supplied at the intervals through the agency of another octave striking it there. Should the weakening octave be fortunate enough to receive this shock and this new supply of energy where it required it — namely, at the intervals — it would continue to develop and would maintain its original direction.

Ouspensky then demonstrated the working of the Law of Seven on the diagram of the Ray of Creation. The Ray of Creation, he said, was a descending octave which started above with the sounding of the note *doh* of the All or Absolute, passed on to *si*, All Possible Worlds (world 3), to *la*, All Suns, or the Milky Way (world 6), to *sol*, our Sun (world 12), to *fa*, All Planets (world 24), to *mi*, the Earth (world 48), to *re*,

the Moon (world 96), and finally to *doh*, the Absolute again. The Ray started therefore in the Absolute, and ended in the Moon, and beyond the Moon there was nothing, and this again was the Absolute. The first interval in this great descending octave occurred between *doh* and *si*, that is to say, between the Absolute and All Worlds, and the second between *fa* and *mi*; in other words, between All Planets and the Earth. It was at these two points that the octave required help, and Ouspensky said that the first of these two intervals between *doh* and *si* was filled by the Absolute, which possessed will and full consciousness. But the Will of the Absolute did not reach so far as the second interval, so that something else must intervene there in order that the octave might continue. Unless a shock were supplied in this situation, no satisfactory passage of forces could take place. In order that this interval between the planets and the Earth might be bridged, a special mechanical contrivance had been placed there, and this transmitting apparatus was Organic Life on the Earth. The whole of life on the Earth could be regarded as forming a kind of sensitive film which covered the crust of the Earth, a film which first absorbed and then liberated energies coming from the higher region of the Ray. 'Organic Life', continued Ouspensky, 'may be looked upon as being both the Earth's organ of perception and its organ of radiation. With the help of Organic Life, each portion of the Earth's surface receives radiations coming from above. So also does Organic Life radiate certain energies in the direction of the Moon. It is affected in turn by influences coming from the various orders of worlds in the Ray. For example, a small accidental tension in the planetary spheres can manifest itself in Organic Life in a prolonged disturbance of human behaviour. Something which was entirely accidental and very transient takes place in planetary space, and it begins to work on the human masses so that people hate and begin to kill one another, and to justify what they are doing by means of some theory of brotherhood, equality of man or

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justice. But', concluded Ouspensky, 'no matter what takes place in the thin film of organic life, it always serves the interests of the earth, the sun, the planets and the moon!'

I was particularly interested in this extraordinary explanation of the function of life on the earth, if for no other reason than that it was the first time I had ever come across an attempt to solve the problem of life on this planet. Some explanation of its presence on the earth was, in my opinion, needed, for I had never been able to accept the ordinary scientific view that the appearance of living things here was purely accidental. So many favourable circumstances had to be provided on the earth before they could survive here that one was almost forced to believe in the existence of a great cosmic plan and in special preparations being made for the arrival of life. Moreover, there were other reasons for believing that life had a very special place in the great plan of world creation, and here was G strengthening these former prejudices of mine, first by confirming that there was such a thing as a plan, and second by saying that life on the earth served a very special purpose. Whether his explanation was a true one or not it was impossible for me to say, but I could not do otherwise than admire the bold imaginative sweep of G's diagram of the Ray of Creation.

At the next meeting Ouspensky resumed his description of the Universe and gave us an account of the kind of stuff out of which everything was made. I had expected that when he came to deal with this, as he would surely have to, he would develop some variety of idealistic philosophy, but no, instead of offering us this he put forward a materialistic philosophy. According to G's teaching, everything in the Universe was material, and potentially capable, therefore, of being weighed. 'But', Ouspensky continued, 'the concept "materiality" is as relative as is the concept "man"', and the materialities of the various worlds in the Ray of Creation are very different. Science regards matter as being everywhere much the same, varying only in such properties as density, and the idea of

different "orders" of materiality is entirely foreign to it. Matter is translatable into energy and, this being so, we can look upon the Universe in three different ways: as a vast field of vibrations, as matter, or as matter in a state of vibration. If we regard the universe as matter in a state of vibration the rate at which it vibrates is always in inverse ratio to its density; in other words, the denser the matter, the slower is its rate of vibration.'

Ouspensky next explained to us that the term 'atom' was used in G's system, and that an atom could be defined as the smallest particle into which matter could be divided without sacrificing any of its qualities. But it was important to bear in mind that G attributed to matter qualities denied to it by Western science, qualities of a psychic and cosmic as well as of a physical nature. We should also be clear about something which had already been mentioned, that matter was very different on different levels of the Ray of Creation, so different, indeed, that what was matter on a higher level of it would not be regarded as being matter at all on a lower level. For example, knowledge was actually material, but from the point of view of someone living on the Earth this idea seemed strange, and even ridiculous. Nevertheless, it should be noted that knowledge possessed one of the characteristics of matter, namely, that the quantity of it existing in a certain place at a certain moment of time was always limited.

Ouspensky then re-drew the Ray of Creation in an abbreviated form which he called the three octaves of radiation, and he pointed out to us that the seven worlds shown on it represented also seven different varieties or orders of materiality, ranging from the finest possible materiality of the Absolute down to the densest of all matters in the Moon. But he told us that although in the diagram these different orders of matter were shown unmixed, pure and existing on different levels of worlds, they were not actually isolated in this way from one another. Everywhere the matter belonging to one level penetrated the matter of another level, as water

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penetrates the interstices of a sponge, and in turn may be permeated with sugar, oxygen or any other substance held in a state of solution. Because, therefore, materials of different cosmic orders were found intermingled in this way, there was no need for anyone to go to the sun in order to examine its materiality. Solar 'material' could be far more readily examined as it existed in ourselves, for man, as has already been emphasized, was a miniature universe, made of the same constituents and subject to the same laws as it. 'But', Ouspensky was careful to add, 'this idea that man is a microcosm in a macrocosm is true only of "man" in the full sense of that word, that is to say, of a man in whom all latent powers have reached full development.'

Ouspensky said that the cosmic laws were the same everywhere and on all planes of the universe, but that when they manifested themselves in the different orders of worlds they produced very different phenomena. Another thing that we had to remember was that we who lived on the Earth and who were subject to its numerous laws were very far removed from the Absolute. That was why he had said on a previous occasion that we were in a very unfavourable position for development. Life on the Earth was very hard, and things which could be attained elsewhere comparatively easily could be attained here on the Earth only as the result of very hard work.

Ouspensky pointed out that the figures by which the various worlds in the Ray of Creation were designated — the figures 1-96 — stood also for the number of forces or orders of law which governed the world in question. In the Absolute there existed only one law and one force, namely, the Will of the Absolute. In the world of the sun there were twelve forces or orders of law, and in the world of our Earth as many as forty-eight. Only in the moon did there exist a still greater number of laws or forces.

Someone asked what were the forty-eight laws which we on the Earth had to obey, and Ouspensky corrected him and



said that they should be regarded as categories of law rather than single laws. There were, for example, a number of biological laws regulating the working of our bodies which had to be obeyed, but what was of most concern to us were the various psychological compulsions which determined our behaviour. These inner compulsions were important because many of them were entirely unnecessary, and what we were now trying to do was to escape from some of them and to live under fewer laws.

As it was not clear to some of his hearers what was meant by 'escaping from unnecessary laws', Ouspensky gave us the example of a man who had been called up for national service. He said that previously such a man had had to obey a number of laws of the realm as a civilian, but that now, as a soldier, he had to obey military regulations as well. If he did not do this, then he was liable to be put under arrest and confined in the guard-room, and there he would come under still more laws. His liberty would, therefore, be very restricted, and in order to free himself he would have first to conform to army regulations and then return to civilian life. If he were then to start work on himself and to struggle against his various identifications, he would gradually free himself from some of the more obvious compulsions of sleeping man, for these were included also in the Earth's forty-eight categories of laws.

And what an immense power these inner compulsions exerted over us. We were jerked through life on the wires of our likes and our dislikes, our blind urges and irrational compulsions, like so many marionettes. What a relief it would be to be free from some of these wires, so that we no longer drooped when something happened not to our liking, and revived again when things went well with us. How restful it would be not to have to be right, and to be under no obligation to convince other people that it was they, and not we, who made the mistake. It was quite unnecessary to seek for examples of living under unnecessary laws amongst

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youths called up for national service, for there were plenty of examples of this in our own lives. And as I thought about the slavery imposed on one by all these inner compulsions, I realized for the first time the meaning of the words I had so often heard in church, 'Whose service is perfect freedom'. If a man managed to reach a higher level of being, and by doing so exchanged a lower for a higher order of laws, he would feel that in comparison with his former slavery his servitude to these new laws was perfect freedom.

At the next meeting Ouspensky drew on the blackboard a simplified diagram of the Ray of Creation. He said that whilst the original diagram of the Ray of Creation had shown how the various worlds were created, this abbreviated one represented the changes which took place in the Universe after it had been created. Actually creation never stopped in the Universe, but the growth of it was now taking place too slowly to be perceptible to such short-lived people as ourselves. The abridged edition of the Ray of Creation on the blackboard represented what Ouspensky called the three octaves of radiation in it, the first of these octaves being the octave between the Absolute and the Sun, the second between the Sun and the Earth and the third that between the Earth and the Moon. From this diagram, and with the help of the two Cosmic Laws, the Law of Three and the Law of Seven, Ouspensky now proceeded to derive a great number of matters with widely varying densities. The differences in their densities were so marked, indeed, that they ranged from 6 in the first series of created worlds to 12,288 at the opposite end of the Ray, namely, the Moon. The method by which the 'table of hydrogens', as it was called, was obtained from the three octaves of radiation is described in Ouspensky's book *In Search of the Miraculous*.

To all of the matters derived in this way from the three octaves of radiation, Ouspensky gave the name Hydrogen, explaining to us, as he recorded their densities, that the term Hydrogen was used in the system to denote a substance when

it was being considered without any reference to any force acting through it. If, however, the matter in question was serving as the conductor of the first of the three kinds of forces, namely, active force, then it took the name Carbon, and, like the carbon of chemistry, it was designated by the letter C. When matter served as a conductor of the second or passive force, it was called Oxygen, and designated by the letter O, and when it functioned as the conductor of the third or neutralizing force, it was given the name Nitrogen and known by the letter N.

When I asked why the makers of this system of knowledge had purloined these terms from chemistry and what relationship the carbon, oxygen and nitrogen of the system bore to the same elements in science, Ouspensky replied that after I had studied my second question more fully I might be able to find out for myself the relationship existing between the hydrogen, carbon, oxygen and nitrogen of the system and the same elements in ordinary chemistry. But, he added, the use of these terms by the makers of the system was of great interest to us, for Organic Chemistry, from which they have been taken, was a comparatively new branch of science, little more than a century old. This suggested, he said, that the ancient system of knowledge we were studying could not have been given its present form longer than about a century ago. The ideas themselves were, of course, far older than this, and all that he was speaking about was the method of presenting them to the Western mind. He added that another fact could be inferred from the use of these terms, namely, that the makers of the system in its present form must have been conversant both with ancient Eastern knowledge and with modern Western science. When pressed to say more about the origin of the system, Ouspensky replied that he could add little or nothing to what he had already said. G had never divulged the source of his knowledge, but had always been deliberately vague when speaking about it. All that he had ever said when questioned on this subject was that different

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esoteric schools in Asia specialized in different subjects. On being pressed to say how, if this were the case, he had managed to study such a large variety of subjects, he had replied: 'I was not alone. There were various kinds of specialists among those of us taking part in the search for truth, and each of us studied his own subject. Afterwards we forgathered and put together all that we had learnt.'

One of the members of the group asked Ouspensky to give us examples of the working of the two great Cosmic Laws, in addition to those with which he had already provided us. To this he replied that we should come across many examples in the further course of our studies, but that in the meantime we could regard the action of a catalytic agent in chemistry as an excellent illustration of the working of the Law of Three. If hydrogen and oxygen were brought together in the correct proportions, they did not combine to form water unless either spongy platinum were present or an electric spark were passed through the mixture of gases. Here the platinum and the electricity acted in the capacity of the third force. But it was for us to find our own examples of the two laws, and he advised us to look for them in the world within us as well as in the world without. We should find an excellent example of the Law of Seven in what had happened when we took up some new activity, such as this work. We usually started off on a new project with great enthusiasm, sounding a note *doh* which was sufficiently strong to allow of our reaching the note *fa* or even the note *mi*. But at this point we often broke down or gave up, unless some new shock from an octave travelling in a similar direction arrived at the interval to rekindle our dying enthusiasm. We could also find many examples of octaves changing their direction at the intervals through lack of any support there, if we studied various forms of human activity. 'Think', he said, pausing and looking round the room, 'how many twists in the line of development must have taken place in Christianity to have produced out of a religion which started from the idea of

universal love something so antithetical to this as the Inquisition and the burning of heretics. Yet the Church does not seem to have noticed any deviation of the direction in which it was travelling, and, whilst busy with its persecutions, was still proclaiming that it was teaching the gospel of Christ. Human history is full of broken and deviated octaves of this kind. Nothing ever stays for long on the same level, for ascent or descent is an event to which all activities are subject. The Law of Octaves not only explains much in our human actions, but it also helps us to understand the incompleteness of our knowledge in every field of study. We start off in one direction and then proceed in a new direction without ever having recognized what has happened.'

Ouspensky concluded his talk on octaves by adding to his original exposition of the Law of Seven two new ideas. He told us that it was only ascending and descending octaves of a cosmic nature which managed to develop in an orderly way, maintaining their original direction, but that with us the orderly completion of an octave occurred only as the result of some fortunate accident. It happened that some other octave travelling in a similar direction impinged on the first octave and by filling up its intervals made it possible for it to complete itself. More often than not our external activities came to an abrupt end, and if we were able to look back and see our lives as they had been lived we should see in our past a trail of broken octaves, of feebly sounded '*doh's*', of '*doh's*' which had reached *re* and had then faded out, and of many octaves arrested at the first intervals. The second idea Ouspensky added to those given at his first two talks on octaves was a particularly important one. It was the idea of vibrations within vibrations, or of inner octaves.

'Each note of an octave', he said, 'can be regarded as containing a whole octave on another plane. We have seen that finer materials in the universe permeate denser ones and in turn are permeated by yet finer matters, and it is in these finer hydrogens that the inner octaves travel. For example,

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the substance of world 48 is saturated with the substance of world 24, and each note of the vibrations in the coarser substance gives rise to a whole octave of the vibrations traveling in this finer substance. It may be said, therefore, that each note of the *Earth* contains a whole octave of the vibrations of the *planetary world*, each note of the *planetary world* a whole octave of the vibrations of the world of the *Sun*, and so on. But there is a definite limit to the development of these inner octaves; as the range of hydrogens is limited, so also is limited the range of inner octaves.'

Ouspensky advised us to look for examples of inner octaves, more particularly in our inner work, and so far as I personally was concerned I found them most often in the uncovering from time to time of new layers of understanding of 'work' ideas. One first comprehended their obvious surface significance, and then, usually quite suddenly, a new and deeper layer of meaning was revealed in them, an experience which I attributed to the sudden perception of an inner octave. I had no opportunity of submitting these observations to Ouspensky, but they are at any rate in line with what he writes about inner octaves in his book *In Search of the Miraculous*. He refers there to G's statement that objective music is all based on inner octaves. Previously G had spoken of art and had said that all ordinary art was subjective. By this he meant that the artist was completely in the power of the ideas and moods with which he was working, and 'it', and not 'he', created whatever resulted from his work. But in objective art the results were calculated so that the artist was able to produce precisely what he wanted to produce. Objective art was mathematical, therefore, and not accidental. It gave rise to the results to which it was required to give rise, and the legend of the destruction of the walls of Jericho by music was a legend about objective music. So also were the Orphean legends concerned with objective art. On a much smaller scale, and in a more primitive form, objective music was seen at work in the art of the snake-charmer. Ouspensky writes of

this as follows: 'It [the snake-charmer's music] is simply one note which is long drawn out, rising and falling only very little; but in this single note "inner octaves" are going on all the time and melodies of inner octaves which are inaudible to the ears but felt by emotional centre. And the snake hears this music or, more strictly speaking, he feels it, and obeys it. The same music, only a little more complicated, and men would obey it.'

There had been previous talks about objective art, and they usually left the artists in our group unsettled and sometimes disgruntled. It was a difficult idea for them to accept, this, that all the art which they knew was subjective art, something that G had dismissed as not being art at all. 'To define Objective Art', G had said to his own group, 'is difficult, first because you ascribe to subjective art the characteristics of objective art, and second because if you happen to come across objective art you do not see that it is on a different level from ordinary art. I measure the merit of art by its consciousness, you by its unconsciousness. A work of objective art is a book which transmits the artist's ideas not directly through words or signs or hieroglyphics but through feelings which he evokes in the beholder consciously and with full knowledge of what he is doing and why he is doing it.'

Ouspensky was repeatedly asked by members of his group whether any works of objective art were still in existence, and he spoke of three things: of the Sphinx in Egypt; of the legend of a statue of Zeus at Olympia which produced in every spectator the same feelings; and of the figure of a god or a devil which G and his fellow explorers had come across in a desert at the foot of the Hindu Kush Mountains. It was a figure which had had a remarkable effect on them all, so that they had seemed to grasp the meaning its creator had wished to convey many centuries previously. And not only the meaning, but 'all the feelings and the emotions connected with it as well'.

Ouspensky also reminded us that literature had its objec-

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tive works of art. He said that the Gospels had been distorted and added to in the process of being copied and translated, but that they had been written originally by men on a higher level than mechanical humanity, that is to say, by men who knew what they were doing and how to do it. There were many other examples of conscious or objective art in the sacred literature of the world.

The philosophical side of G's system and his account of the Universe cannot be submitted to a practical test in the way that knowledge of a psychological nature can. All that it was possible for me to do was to examine G's account of the Ray of Creation carefully, see whether it was consistent with other ideas we had been given, and then make up my mind whether it provided me with a reasonable account of the Universe and its creation. There was this at any rate to be said in its favour that, apart from the poetic description of creation in the book of Genesis, it was the only reasonable account of it I had ever been offered.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THOUGHTS ON THE RAY OF CREATION

Who knows the secret? Who can unfold it?  
Whence indeed this Manifold Whole arose?  
The Divine Individuals were subsequent to its arising.  
Who, then, can tell whence this Great Creation sprang?  
Whether beyond it there is a Will or whether there is none,  
Only He who is the Consciousness of all that Exists  
Only He knows — and even He may not know!

So recited the author of the *Rig Veda*, or Hymn of Creation, some 1,500 years before the coming of Christ, for the Vedas were passed down by word of mouth long before they were committed to paper. And having expressed doubt whether even 'He who is the Consciousness of all that Exists' knows fully the story of creation, the *Rig Veda* tells us that before the manifestation of the phenomenal Universe . . . 'there was neither non-entity nor entity, neither atmosphere nor sky beyond. Death was not, nor therefore immortality; nor day nor night. That One breathless by its essence. There was nothing different from it nor beyond it. From this germ burst forth mighty productive powers, nature below and energy above.'

The Universe has always been and will always be a mystery to man. There is nothing with which it can be compared, for it is all and leaves no room for anything else. In most people wonder has died, but those who still ponder over the mystery of their own existence and of their relationship with the Universe resemble children who, having come up against something surpassingly strange, seek to lessen the mystery of it all by telling themselves reassuring stories about it. We have many different stories from which to choose. There is

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the very clever story told by the scientists, but it is an exasperating tale which breaks off almost before it has begun. Heraclitus, the Father of Science, started and ended his account of everything in a single exclamation: 'There is nothing but atoms and space.' And this same truncated tale, occasionally with slight additions to it, is still being told by some of our present-day scientists. 'There exists nothing', they murmur, 'except dancing particles, or except positive and negative electricity. It is quite useless to speculate about the nature of such things.'

But in G's Ray of Creation I had been given new material of outstanding interest to think about. It was the story of the creation of the Universe as narrated by a seer in a higher state of consciousness, and the first thing which struck me about it was its similarity to the story told by the *rishis* responsible for the Indian Vedas, a story which has been simplified as much as possible for everyday use.

As I grow older I become less and less confident of the ability of my mind, or of any other human mind, to see things as they really are. In youth I saw myself scaling fearlessly up great pinnacles of thought, climbing higher and yet higher into the empyrean in search of truth, and finally reaching out to capture it. With age this picture of mine has lost all its heroism and its grandeur. I no longer see an intrepid climber, but instead a very small child, seated in some sort of kindergarten school and scribbling down simple words on a slate. Things have to be made very easy for me and my companions, for, however hard we pretend, our minds are capable of understanding very little about all the things which are of real importance to us. We can never hope to see them as they actually are, and must be content with only approximations to the truth. So, during all of Ouspensky's interesting talks about the Ray of Creation, and particularly whenever anything of a very startling nature was announced, I would hear myself murmuring in an undertone: 'Not exactly that, but something very like it. Of

course, all these things have to be made very easy for us, and that was the simplest way of putting it that the makers of the system could devise.'

There was, for example, that rather astonishing and startling statement of G's about everything, including knowledge, being material. At first my mind shied at it, as a horse shies at anything strange, but undoubtedly there were great advantages to be gained by accepting this idea, if on further examination it turned out to be possible to do so. The relationship between mind and matter, and the way in which these radically different entities manage to meet and to act on one another, as they certainly do, has been an age-long puzzle to the philosophers, and here was an excellent way out of the difficulty. That the mind affected the body nobody could possibly doubt, and the best way of solving the puzzle of how it managed to do this was to substitute a monistic for a dualistic philosophy. Great advantages were obtained from regarding the Universe as being composed of a single stuff, whether that stuff were taken to be mind or matter. At first I had felt that I should have preferred an idealistic to a materialistic monism, but the materialism advanced by G's system was so utterly different from ordinary scientific materialism that I was quite willing now to adopt it.

Obviously there were only two possible methods of closing the gap between mind and matter, the first being that used by the materialistic scientists — the method of bringing mind down to the level of matter — and the second, that of raising matter up to the level of the mind. This was the method which the contrivers of G's system of thought had chosen and had carried out very successfully. One of the immediate benefits which had been conferred by this manœuvre of theirs was that it restored to the Universe what both the materialists and the Cartesian dualists had removed from it: life, purpose and intelligence. The system regarded the Universe, and everything in it, as being alive, and living entails a ceaseless interchange between the organism and its environ-

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ment, a commerce in energies so marked that it is often difficult to decide where the organism ends and where its environment begins. The system also implied that everything in the Universe is much more closely linked with everything else than is generally supposed, so that, as Ouspensky had said, a change here on the earth might have some unexpected effects on a far-distant world. In talking of the Ray of Creation, he had also described the space between the various worlds of the Ray of Creation as being charged with forces passing in different directions, and these energies were a kind of spilling-over of energies from living things into their environment.

What is of interest to me at this present moment, as I sit at my desk recalling the ideas I learnt from Ouspensky in that Warwick Gardens room over twenty years, is that whereas then they were highly unorthodox, some of them now enjoy scientific support. For example, it was from Ouspensky, and not from scientific books, that I first learnt that matter and energy were really one and the same thing, and that the Universe was in process of creating itself. I am aware that the latter idea has not as yet been generally accepted by the astronomers, but there are many who now favour it and who look upon interstellar space as being the matrix from which the material required by the Universe for further creation comes. According to Hoyle, the quantity of hydrogen existing in space greatly exceeds the amount to be found in all stellar galaxies of the Universe, and it is out of this spare hydrogen in space that the new worlds are being built. In other words, so richly charged with energy is interstellar space that some astrophysicists look upon it as being the womb out of which everything new is born. Summing up this idea in his Gifford Lectures, Macneile Dixon states that it is in this great network of radiations in space, and not in the condensation of matter in the stars and nebulae, that the creative energies of Nature lie. 'Tangible and visible things are but the poles, or terminations of these fields of

unperceived energy. Matter, if it exists at all in any sense, is a sleeping partner in the firm of Nature.' (Macneile Dixon, *The Human Situation*.)

The continuous creation theory, supported by such scientists as Bondi, Golde and Hoyle, postulates that the interstellar matter of the Universe is maintained at a constant level by the appearance of one new atom of hydrogen in the course of a year in a volume of space equal to that occupied by St. Paul's Cathedral. At first sight this amount of new material would seem too little to supply requirements for Universe-building, but when the vastness of space is recalled, and when it is borne in mind that fresh material is being manufactured throughout the whole of it, the total amount created becomes staggering. Moreover, many astrophysicists believe that the creation of this new matter supplies the spreading force responsible for the expansion of the Universe. As worlds hurry into the far limits of space and are lost for ever, new ones are being formed to take their place.

G's insistence on the connectedness of everything, and his statement that humanity is susceptible to influences reaching it from the planets, led to questions being asked at Ouspensky's next meeting on the subject of astrology. 'Is there anything in it?' someone inquired, and to this Ouspensky replied that there had once existed a true science of astrology, but that this ancient knowledge had now become distorted. He also reminded the questioner of the fact that the sole part of man's psyche influenced by the planets was his essence, and that in modern Western man essence was very rarely developed properly. This was why G had spoken of masses of humanity rather than individual men and women being affected by planetary influences. Ouspensky said that a story would show best how G had answered a similar question about astrology when it was asked him in the Moscow group. Ouspensky said that G and some of the people in this group went for a walk in a park and that G was a little in front of them, whilst they walked behind deeply engaged in a con-

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versation on the subject of astrology. G suddenly dropped his stick, and one of them, bending down, picked it up and handed it back to him. G continued to walk ahead for a minute or two as he had done before, and then he turned and said, '*That* was astrology.' Astrology is concerned only with essence, and it is essence which determines also a man's type. He explained that all of them had seen him drop his stick, yet only one of them had bent down to pick it up and give it back to him. He then asked each of them in turn to describe what he had felt and how he had reacted inwardly to the sight of the stick falling. The first of them said that as he was looking in another direction at the time he had never even noticed that G had dropped his stick. The second said that he happened to have been watching G very carefully at that moment and that he had come to the conclusion that the falling of the stick was not an accident but that G had dropped it quite deliberately. For this reason he had waited to see what would happen next. The third said he had been so absorbed by his thoughts on the subject of astrology that it had never occurred to him to stop thinking about it in order to pick up the stick on the ground. The fourth's reaction had been so slow that before he had had time to make up his mind somebody else had done what in all probability he would have done had he had sufficient time. And by describing in this way their various reactions, G's followers demonstrated to him also their types, a subject in which G was particularly interested. Ouspensky told us that there once existed an ancient science of types but, as he personally knew very little about it, he did not propose to enlarge on this subject.

A feature of G's account of creation which appealed to me very strongly was the idea about the function of life on this planet. He described Organic Life as a film which encircled the earth and which possessed certain important properties. It absorbed some of the energies reaching it from space, transformed them and then transmitted them onwards to the Earth. According to G, life on the Earth was no accident,

but something which was necessary to the well-being of the Earth. I now asked myself whether there was anything which supported this theory? When one took into consideration the teeming world of micro-organisms on the land and the equally abounding plankton life of the oceans, it was not unreasonable to liken Organic Life to a film covering the Earth, but was there anything which confirmed the ingenious idea that this film is a transformer of energies?

I have given this idea much thought since I first heard of it some thirty years ago, and the most obvious example of life on the Earth acting as a transformer of energy is provided by the plants. A large amount of the ultra-violet light reaching us from the Sun is absorbed by the stratosphere, in which it brings about certain changes in the way of ionization, and is also responsible for the two phenomena, the Aurora Borealis and the Zodiacal Light. But it is the fate of the light which penetrates the stratosphere which interests us most, for it is this light which is responsible for the phenomenon of photosynthesis in plants, a chemical industry on which animal life is entirely dependent. In the leaves of the plant light supplies the energy for the building up of the smaller molecules of water and carbon dioxide into the larger molecules of starch, sugar and cellulose. In other words, plants receive light-energy, transform it into chemical energy, and the products of this ceaseless industry find their way back eventually into the soil. It may well be that many other transformations of energy are being carried out by Organic Life of which we as yet know nothing.

Of one thing at any rate we can be certain, and that is that Organic Life has played, and is still playing a very important role in the development of the Earth. I am indebted to Vernadsky's very interesting book, *Le Biosphère*, for the following facts about the role played by life in the Earth's evolution. By the term *biosphère*, Vernadsky means the film of life which is spread over the surface of the Earth and which penetrates the more superficial layers of its crust.

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He regards this film as a very active agent or, to use his own words, as 'a . . . continual, permanent and powerful disturber of inertia on the face of our planet . . .', a description of Organic Life which is very similar to that given by G. Vernadsky writes that life has such a profound effect on the chemical processes going on in the Earth's crust that if all life were suddenly to perish, many of these chemical processes would come to a standstill. The minerals in the upper layers of the crust, the free alum, all siliceous acids and the hydrates of iron and aluminium would no longer be formed in them, because the elements out of which these compounds are made would have combined to form other chemical compounds. A state of chemical equilibrium would therefore be imposed on the Earth, a chemical calm which would be disturbed only by an occasional upward thrust of material from the deeper layers of the crust, by certain gaseous emanations and by rare volcanic eruptions. So slow would all chemical changes in the Earth's crust become that they would only be noticeable after the passage of long periods of geological time. Free oxygen and carbonic acid would also be considerably reduced in the atmosphere and, because of this poverty of oxygen, oxidation processes on the Earth's surface would, to all intents and purposes, cease.

It must be borne in mind that much of the work of the biosphere is so unobtrusive that it passes unnoticed. But for the researches of the bacteriologists and the chemists the various activities of the micro-organisms in the soil would be quite unknown. The work done by other small forms of life is much more spectacular because it is performed on a truly colossal scale. So immense are the undertakings of the Foraminifera and the Radiolaria that they lead to changes in the landscape such as the formation of hills and downs.

In view of all that has happened, and is still happening, to the Earth's crust since life first appeared on this planet, it is difficult to subscribe any longer to the current scientific view that life stumbled on to the Earth only by accident. I am



convinced that G is right when he declares that everything is much more dependent on everything else than the scientists believe it to be. So also do I believe that the Universe is run on a principle of reciprocal feeding, or self-maintenance, and that life is as dependent on the Earth as the Earth is dependent on it.

There was much in G's description of the Universe which should have raised a fierce resistance in a person reared, as I had been reared, on a strict scientific diet: such as his ideas about the respective 'intelligence' of the Earth and of the Sun. But actually I did not react to these strange notions as I might have been expected to react to them, for I have never been whole-hearted in my acceptance of the scientist's 'machine view' of the Universe. I have regarded it as entirely natural that in the great machine age, men should look upon the Universe as a great engine, just as in a more primitive age they had looked upon it as being the home of gods and demons. But the allegory of the running-down engine favoured by the nineteenth-century scientists, and the allegory of the jazz dance of particles which has now taken its place, give a very one-sided view of the Universe. Personally I prefer Whitehead's picture of it as a vast, living and intelligent organism.

The question of the viruses, and whether they were living organisms or only ferments, was troubling the bacteriologists at the time when I was studying G's Ray of Creation; and I was convinced that there existed no real division between the so-called animate and the so-called inanimate. All that distinguished the one from the other was that the animate was more dynamic, more precariously poised, more sensitive and consequently quicker than the inanimate to respond to environmental changes. The very stones enjoyed a rudimentary kind of life and were in commerce with their surroundings — a fact of which scientists became more fully aware when studying things in terms of fields of force. No, there was nothing in G's Ray of Creation which affronted

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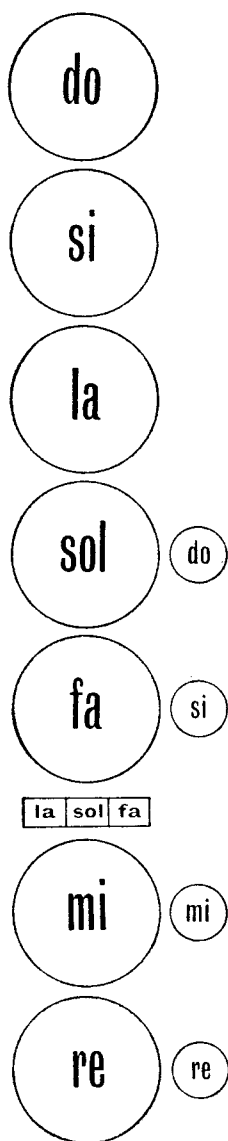
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reason and a great deal in it which was in harmony with Whitehead's *Philosophy of Organism*.

The entities with which the scientists are dealing are not the sole realities, nor even the more genuine realities, for there is much in the Universe they are unable to see, let alone measure. For convenience of study they have made certain abstractions from the whole, but, as Whitehead has pointed out, these abstractions are '... nothing else than omissions of part of the truth'. Yet many people are misled by the scientists' abstractions and believe them to be the very bricks and mortar out of which the Universe has been built. Having accepted much of Whitehead's *Philosophy of Organism*, I was both interested and glad to find that G had the same outlook on the Universe as Whitehead, and felt, as he did, that we should not be able to make any sense of it until we had returned to it the intelligence and life of which science had deprived it.

The more I pondered over G's Ray of Creation the richer in meaning it became for me. It was the symbol for a great many different ideas. It showed that everything in the Universe was closely knit with everything else, and among the other relationships portrayed was the relationship between different densities of matter. In the Ray could be found every kind of matter, from the finest of all material in the Absolute down to the densest of all possible matters in the Moon. And since matter possessed psychic as well as material properties, the Ray represented a ladder of Being as well as a scale of matters, a ladder on which every possible level of consciousness and intelligence was marked. Everything could be found there from the Supreme Intelligence, Consciousness and Will of the Absolute, down to the darkness and brute mechanism of the Moon.

At one of the meetings devoted to the Ray of Creation, Ouspensky had made an extremely interesting addition to it. He said that every note of any octave, and in this particular case every note of the great Cosmic octave, might act as the



*doh* of some new lateral octave issuing from it. As an example of this, he placed by the side of *sol* (the Sun) in the Cosmic octave a new note *doh*; by the side of *fa* (the sphere of the planets) he placed a new note *si*; and he then inserted three notes — *la*, *sol*, *fa* — between the *fa* of the Cosmic Octave and the *mi* of it (the Earth). See Fig. 3. He said that these three notes inserted between the planets and the Earth constituted Organic Life on the Earth. He then pointed out that the *mi* of this new lateral octave blended with the *mi* of the Earth, and that the *re* of the new lateral octave blended with the *re* of the Moon. He said that a great deal could be learnt from this smaller lateral octave, and that perhaps the most important lesson of all to be derived from it was that *the life octave began not on the Earth but in the Sun*. Here again G, as on many other occasions, spoke of things coming down from above, whereas all modern thought tends to derive the higher from the lower, instead of the lower from the higher.

What could this idea of life beginning on the level of the Sun mean? G had previously spoken of the Sun as being

FIG. 3—The Ray of Creation showing the lateral octave of life which starts in the Sun. The three notes of this smaller life octave, *la*, *sol*, *fa*, represent Organic Life, and they fill the interval between *mi* and *fa* in the larger octave of the Ray of Creation.

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divine in comparison with the Earth, and I tried to reconcile these two statements in connection with the coming of life to the Earth. I pictured the Great Artist Nature at work, patiently building up the molecules of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, potassium, phosphorus, calcium, together with small traces of other elements, into larger and larger molecules, which grew not only in size but also in complexity. Carbon was obviously the most useful of these crude elements out of which life was being made, because of its ability to hold in its grip six other atoms. In this way it would make possible the weaving of those long chemical chains of the carbohydrates on which life so much depended. But at this point in the making of life there would be required some new access of energy which would bring together into some vital pattern these rapidly developing molecules, and also give to the new pattern the capacity to divide, and thus reproduce itself. How this final step was accomplished may never be known by science, but some of the authoritative books I consulted suggested that in all likelihood ' . . . those liveliest of energy granules . . . ' coming from the Sun (the photons) may have made an all-important contribution to the manufacture of life at this stage. In other words, the Sun accomplished this final piece of work and became the father of life on this planet, as the Earth had been its mother. But really it was the Sun which had initiated the whole process of the creation of Organic Life on this planet.

The blending of the *mi* of G's lateral life octave with the *mi* of the Cosmic octave could be easily explained, for when living creatures die on this Earth their physical remains disappear into the soil. But what was the *re* of the lateral octave which blended with the *re* of the Moon? A question on this very subject had been asked at the previous meeting, and Ouspensky had replied that this note *re* was clearly connected with the idea of Organic Life acting as food for the Moon. Some energy was liberated at death from all living things, and, according to G, this energy went to the Moon. This

idea was, of course, related to the idea that the series of worlds which made up the Ray of Creation was a growing branch, and that the Moon, if properly nourished, would in course of time come to resemble the Earth and the Earth to resemble the Sun.

Recalling, as I do now, these old memories of Ouspensky's meetings, I remember that when Ouspensky first drew the Ray of Creation on the blackboard, I looked at it with considerable interest, but felt that events on such a great scale as these were of so little importance to me personally that it did not much matter what particular system of cosmology I accepted. But gradually I came to realize that different cosmological systems had different philosophical implications and that it would be a mistake, therefore, to regard them all with indifference. For example, there was the great question as to which came first, matter or mind. Plato divided men into two groups: those who were of the opinion that matter had given rise to mind, and those who thought the other way round and believed that it was mind which had given rise to matter. Ever since then philosophers have ranged themselves under these two headings, some seeking to derive the higher from the lower, and others explaining the lower in terms of the higher. Broadly speaking, the West has favoured the former view, that the lower has given rise to the higher, and the East the latter view, that it is the higher that has given rise to the lower.

Up till the time of the Renaissance, Western and Eastern ideas on this subject were very similar, for the Christian Church taught that everything came from God above. To think otherwise than this was heretical, and consequently all scientific discoveries had to be brought into line with the Church's ruling on the subject. But at the Renaissance a great reaction occurred against this ecclesiastical domination of men's minds, and many beliefs, sponsored by the Church, such as the belief that everything came down from above, were now jettisoned. At this time of research and re-

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valuation, natural philosophers, as scientists were then called, were beginning to discover the laws by which the Universe was ruled, and this meant that the great age of science was not very far distant. The intellectuals of this period were inclined, therefore, to revoke the previous ruling and to put into its place the more fashionable one that the higher had been derived from the lower. In their enthusiasm for this materialistic pattern of thought, mind was expelled from the Universe and matter put there to rule in its stead.

But here in G's Ray of Creation was to be found a reconciliation of Eastern and Western modes of thought. By restoring the older ruling that everything came originally from the Supreme Intelligence of the Absolute, the principle of mind was allowed back into a realm in which it was very badly needed, and at the same time a place was found in the grand scheme of things for the manifestation of the mechanical laws of science. I realized in course of time how much more there was in G's Ray of Creation than I had originally thought.

Whilst engaged in the study of the Ray of Creation, I came across the following passage in Sri Aurobindo's work, *Life Divine*: 'We speak of the evolution of Life in Matter, the evolution of the Mind in Matter; but evolution is a word which merely states the phenomenon without explaining it. For there seems to be no reason why Life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out of living form, unless we accept the Vedanta solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life is a form of veiled Consciousness. And then there seems little objection to a further step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond Mind.'

Aurobindo then goes on to say that this is the explanation of man's unconquerable striving towards something higher, towards God, Light, Bliss, Freedom and even Immortality.

And without doubt man's restless urge towards something on a higher level than himself requires an explanation. Freud dismissed it all as man's great delusion, the obsessional neurosis from which humanity suffers, but it cannot be disposed of in this off-hand way. Man possesses a faculty, a special organ for dealing with spiritual values, and Nature never evolves useless organs in her creatures. She would not have endowed animals with eyes unless there had already existed light to which these eyes would become sensitive. Nor would she have put into man a hunger for something higher than himself if there existed nothing by which this hunger could ever be assuaged. Despite the warning of the intellectualists that it is useless to ask unanswerable questions, men continue their search for spiritual truths and as a result of their persistence new religions arise to replace the older ones destroyed by scepticism. According to G, man fulfils the needs of the cosmos as he is, so that there is no need for him to evolve any further, but the fact that so many men are obsessed by this vehement impulse of inquiry and this unquenchable intuition of the existence of something higher than themselves is surely a sign that provision has been made in the Great Plan for the possibility of man's spiritual evolution.<sup>1</sup> It is also implied in Sri Aurobindo's writings, for he finishes his chapter on human aspirations with these words: 'And if there is any higher light of illumined intuition or self-revealing truth which is now in man either obstructed and inoperable or works with intermittent glancings as if from behind a veil . . . then we need not fear to aspire. For it is likely that such is the next higher state of consciousness of which Mind is only a form and veil, and through the splendour of that light may be the path of our progressive self-enlargement into whatever highest state is humanity's ultimate resting place.'

<sup>1</sup> The idea of two contrary movements, a downward creative thrust from the Absolute and an upward climb towards the source of everything, is to be found in the philosophy of Plotinus.

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE THREE-STORIED FACTORY

I HAD intended to ask Ouspensky more about the two contrary movements occurring in the Ray of Creation — that is to say, about the descending octave by which denser and denser matters were being formed, and about the other ascending movement which might in time lead to the Moon becoming more like the Earth and the Earth more like the Sun. But my question could not be put, for at the beginning of the next meeting Ouspensky announced that, having given examples of the action of the two great cosmic laws working on an immense scale, he now proposed to show their working on the much smaller scale of man. Man, he reminded us, was a model of the Universe, a microcosm in macrocosm, and many statements which applied to the Universe applied also to him. Moreover, a large range of the matters or hydrogens found in the Ray of Creation were to be found in man. His being contained matters from the level of the Sun and even from a still higher level, and his possession of such high hydrogens was one of the factors which made it possible for him to evolve. Ouspensky said that so far we had been studying the creation and maintenance of the universe, but that the time had come for a similar study of the maintenance of man.

Man, Ouspensky began, expended a large amount of energy every day in living, and this energy was derived from his food. According to the system, he took in not one but three kinds of food: the ordinary food he put into the mouth, the air he drew into his lungs, and the impressions he received by way of his special sense-organs. It was quite easy



to accept the idea that air was a food on which he was even more dependent than he was on the food he chewed and swallowed, but the idea that our sense impressions were also food would be strange to us. Yet the impressions reaching us from the outer world were all parcels of energy, whether we took them in the form of light waves impinging on our retinas, as sound waves reaching us through our ears or as heat rays striking our skin. Moreover, as he had already pointed out to us, it was these impressions from the external world which activated us and set us in motion in the same way that the driving-belt set in motion the lathes in an engineering workshop. If all the impressions from the outer world were to cease — and there were others besides light, heat and sound waves — we should plunge straight into a coma and rapidly die. Of the three varieties of food, impressions were by far the most important to us, and we were able to survive the loss of them only for a very short time.

Ouspensky then drew on the blackboard a new diagram which he said represented man as a three-storied chemical factory. The work of this factory was to convert coarser matters into finer matters, the coarser matters being the raw material we took in as food, and the finer matters being the various materials we required for the maintenance of our machinery and for the fuel consumed in running it. Ouspensky said that one of the reasons why we were unable to remember ourselves and why the Higher Centres in us did not function was that we possessed insufficient of the finer fuels. Hydrogen 12 was needed by both Emotional and Higher Emotional Centres, and we were invariably short of this high-octave spirit, so that Emotional Centre in us usually had to work with Hydrogen 24. There were two ways of obviating this shortage: first, by ceasing to waste Hydrogen on useless projects, and second, by producing more of it. It was about the manufacture of finer hydrogens that he now wanted to speak.

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by saying that the alchemical processes by which the grosser materials were transformed into finer ones were governed, as all other processes were governed, by the law of octaves. He explained that he used the term 'alchemical' instead of the more usual term 'chemical' because what he was about to describe was more closely connected with the ancient science of alchemy than with the modern science of chemistry. The words 'Learn to separate the fine from the coarse' were inscribed on the Emerald Tablets of Hermes Trismegistus, and we should find that these words were appropriate to the working of the three-storied factory. The upper floor of the factory corresponded roughly with the head, the middle floor with the chest and the lowermost with the stomach, back and lower part of the body. The ordinary physical food we took in by the mouth was H 768 in the cosmic scale of hydrogens which he had previously given us, and, after being swallowed, this coarse material entered the lowermost story or abdomen as *doh* 768. Because it was acting here as the conductor of the passive force of a triad, it would not be called Hydrogen 768, but Oxygen 768. After entering the body it met Carbon 192 (saliva and its contained ferments), and was transformed quickly into Nitrogen 384 (see Fig. 4). Ouspensky now pointed out that the three substances Oxygen 768, Carbon 192 and Nitrogen 384, shown on the diagram, formed a triad, and that in following the progress of the three foods through the three-storied factory we had excellent examples of the way in which the two fundamental cosmic laws, the Law of Three and the Law of Seven, worked together.

The diagram which Ouspensky drew on the board, and which showed the working of the two fundamental laws within the human body, was an extremely complicated one, and it is not proposed to reproduce it here. In order to keep things simpler, only the first triads in the series of triads has been given in Fig. 4. In Figs. 5 and 6 the transformation of coarser into finer hydrogens is shown only as an ascending octave, the triads not being marked. Returning to the octave

of the food taken in by the mouth, *doh* 768 is converted, with the help of certain digestive juices, first into *re* 384, and then into *mi* 192 (see Fig. 5). Here the process of refining would come to an end were it not for the fact that the food octave received the help of another octave in filling the interval *mi-fah*. The octave which provides this required help is the second or air octave. This enters the three-storied factory on

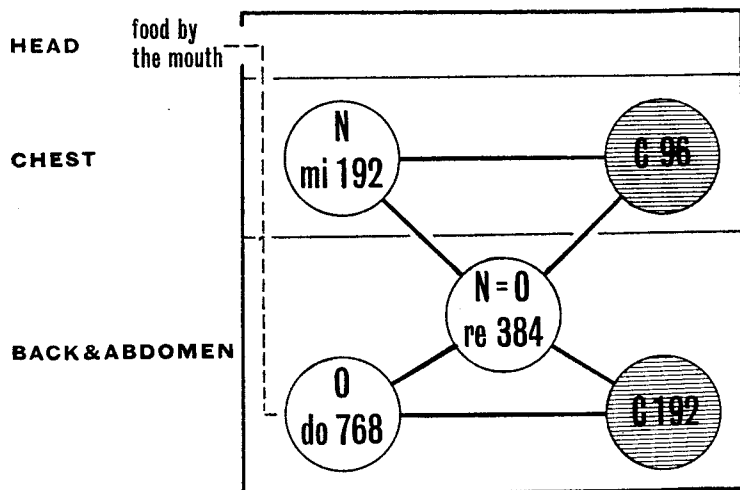


FIG. 4—The first two triads in the octave of the digestion of food (H 768). Carbon, the bearer of the active force in these triads, is represented by the shaded circles.

the second floor, meets the food octave there and imparts to it some of its superfluous energy, so that *mi* 192 passes to *fah* 96, *sol* 48, *la* 24 and *si* 12. Here it comes to an end in front of the *si-doh* interval. We now follow the progress of the second or air octave, and we find that *doh* 192 is converted into *re* 96 and *mi* 48. Because it receives no outside help at the interval between *mi* and *fah*, its progress is arrested here. The third or impressions octave comes to a stop even sooner. It sounds the note *doh* 48 in the uppermost or head story, but sounds it so feebly that it gets no further.

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*do* 48

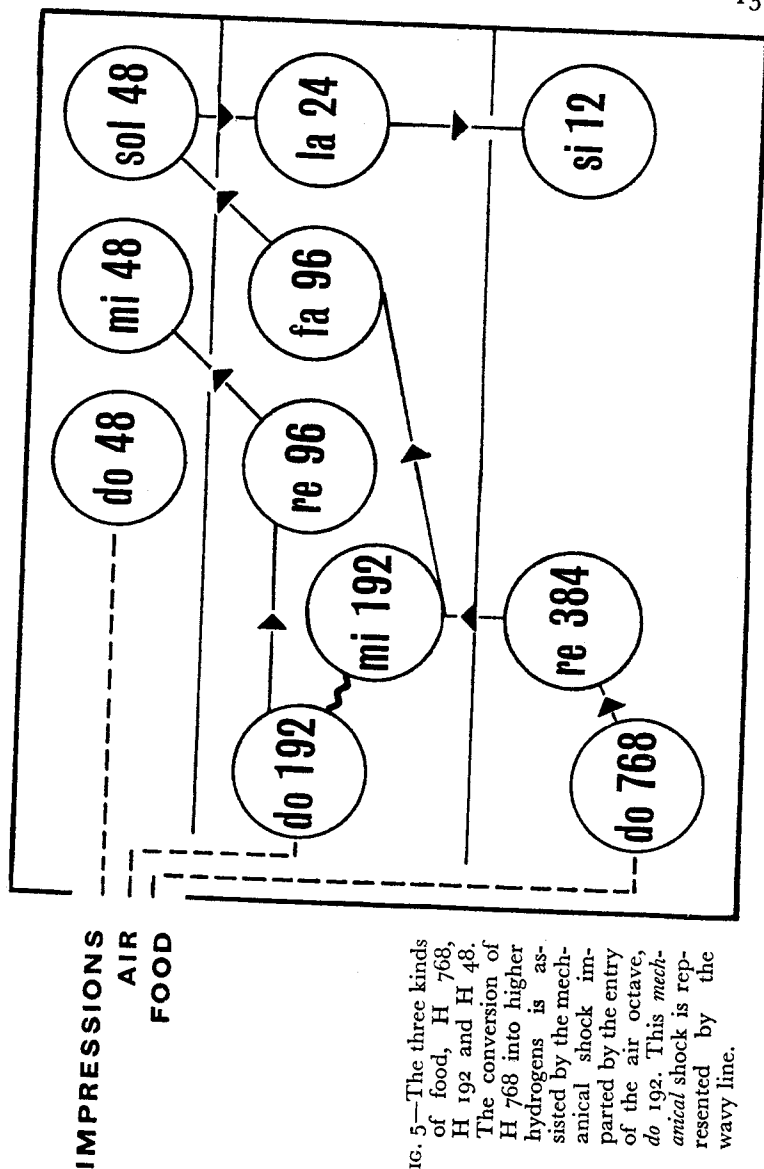


FIG. 5—The three kinds of food, H 768, H 192 and H 48. The conversion of H 768 into higher hydrogens is assisted by the mechanical shock imparted by the entry of the air octave, do 192. This *mechanical* shock is represented by the wavy line.

Having completed the drawing of the three-storied factory, Ouspensky pointed out that the octave of the first kind of food was the only one to produce any of the much-needed H 12, and that the two other octaves only managed to progress as far as *mi* 48 and *doh* 48. If therefore we were to manufacture more H 12, it would have to be through the air and impressions octaves going further. Fortunately a more complete development of these octaves could be brought about by creating an artificial or conscious shock at the right place, that is to say, at the point at which the note *doh* 48 was being sounded. This point coincided in time with the moment at which impressions were about to enter our consciousness, and if the level of our consciousness were raised at that moment by self-remembering, the impressions would strike us with additional force. As a result of this, *doh* 48 would sound much more loudly in the upper story, would pass first to *re* 24 and then to *mi* 12, where it would stop at the interval (see Fig. 6). Because of the clearer sounding of *doh* 48, it possessed sufficient energy also to make contact with *mi* 48 of the air octave and to impart to it the additional force necessary for its passage to *fah* 24, *sol* 12 and even to *la* 6, which was the highest hydrogen the human factory was capable of making. Ouspensky ended his description of the three-storied factory by saying that the production of higher hydrogens could be increased even further by the production of yet another conscious shock in the human organism. As the precise nature of this second artificial shock was more difficult to describe than the first conscious shock of self-remembering, he did not propose at the present moment to discuss it.

The most important lesson to be drawn from the study of the food diagram was that we were very badly run chemical concerns, factories which succeeded in producing only just enough end-products in the way of finer materials to keep the machinery running. It would, indeed, be more correct to admit that we did not even reach this low standard of



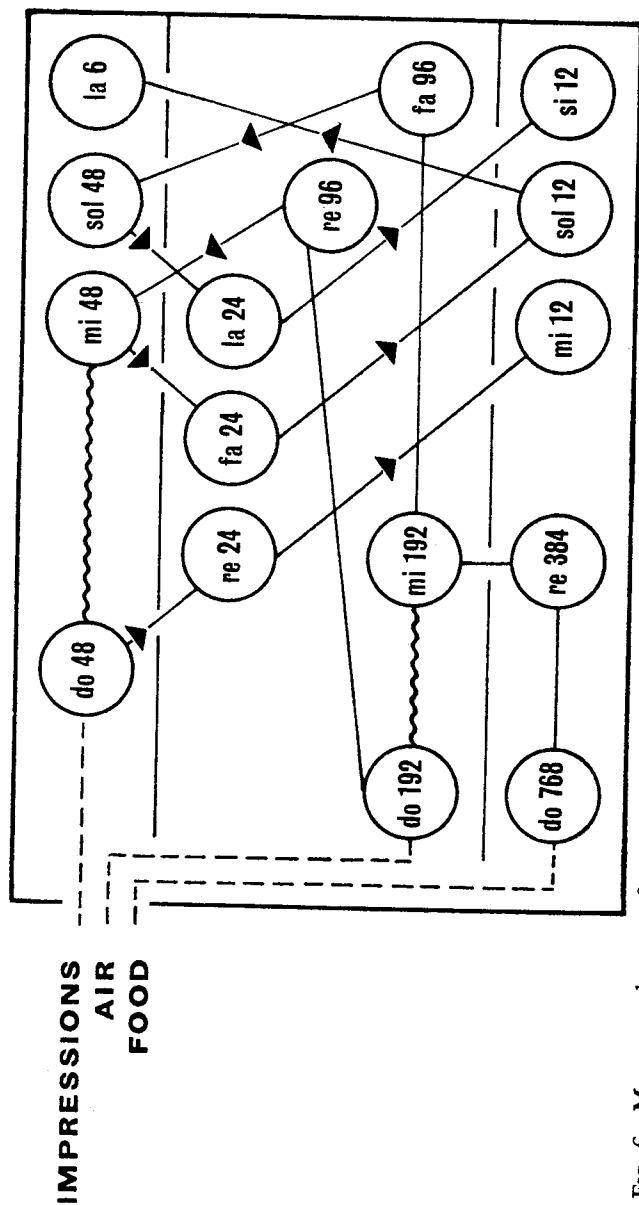


FIG. 6—More complete transformation into higher hydrogens produced by the intervention of a second and *conscious* shock at the moment of entry of sensory impressions into consciousness. This is represented by the second wavy line.

production, for whereas emotional centre ought to be provided with H 12 for its fuel, it was usually forced to run on H 24, the same fuel as that used by moving centre. And the explanation of this sad state of affairs was that very large quantities of the finer products leaked out of holes or else were burnt up in useless activities, such as identifications, unnecessary talking, muscular tension and negative emotions. A few minutes of indulgence in anger or despair was sufficient to destroy what it had taken the factory many hours to make, so that we felt completely depleted of energy. It would be highly unprofitable for us, Ouspensky said, to make great efforts to increase the output of the finer products of the factory before we had taken steps to reduce so large an amount of wastage.

Ouspensky advised us to start this saving process by finding out what were our favourite methods of squandering energy, for although we all resembled each other in being highly uneconomical concerns, we differed in our methods of dissipating energy, one person using up a great deal of energy say in unnecessary talking or day-dreaming, another in inner-considering and yet a third in negative emotions.

Our observations on this subject during the next few months yielded some very interesting results, and in time we discovered not only many of our leakages, but even experienced the sensation of energy pouring out of us at the time at which the wastage was occurring. The idea of useless expenditure of energy passed thus from the realm of theory into that of practice, so that it was no longer possible to doubt its truth.

Ouspensky said that the energy we manufactured today was for tomorrow's use, and he advised us, when tomorrow came, to keep some sort of rough account of the way in which we spent it. If we did so, we should find how improvident we were in our expenditure of this very valuable material. We resembled people with a shilling a day to live on who wasted the whole of the shilling during the earlier hours of

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the morning on entirely unnecessary things, so that they had nothing on which to live for the rest of the day. The higher hydrogens were the most valuable things we possessed, required not only for ordinary living but also for inner growth and development. Ouspensky then reminded us of what he had previously said about the formation of the finer bodies in more evolved men; namely, that these bodies were made out of accumulated reserves of higher hydrogens. There was, he said, no possibility of any real change taking place in us unless we both saved and manufactured much more of these valuable substances.

Ouspensky was particularly interested in the writings of the old alchemists who were popularly reputed to be engaged only in the study of methods of transforming the baser metals into gold. But this nominal work of theirs was often a screen for secret activities. In the Middle Ages it was extremely dangerous for anyone to take an interest in systems of philosophy and psychology which were not countenanced by the all-powerful, and sometimes tyrannical, Church. Any suspicion that men were meddling with such pagan practices provided sufficient grounds for their immediate arrest and trial for heresy, and the occupation of transforming baser into finer metals provided thinkers with a convenient façade behind which to work. The interest of the best type of alchemist lay not so much in the changing of lead into gold as in the transformation of man into a new kind of man. Ouspensky said that it was likely that some of the alchemists were students of ideas very similar to those in which we were now interested.

I wondered as I walked home from the meeting, whether all this talk about the transformation of grosser substances into finer matters, and about the conversion of *doh* 48 in the impressions octave into *re* 12 by means of a conscious shock, was of any practical value to me. So far as I was concerned, the chief interest of the diagram of man as a three-storied factory lay in the fact that it brought together and showed



the relationship between two parts of man which had never before been combined in a single diagram; namely, the physical food he took in by the mouth and the psychological impressions he received through his sense-organs. For the first time in my experience two very incompatible pieces of man were being fitted together, his physiology and his psychology. This was, of course, the result of what had previously been done: namely, the substitution of a monistic for a dualistic philosophy.

Was it justifiable, I wondered, to regard impressions as food? The idea was not unreasonable if by food was meant raw material which had to be taken in order to maintain life and growth. What Ouspensky had said about the vital need for impressions was probably true, and I recalled a reference in Michael Foster's *Physiology* to a boy with some nervous disease which had destroyed all tactile sensation, hearing and the sight of one eye, a boy who immediately went to sleep when the other, seeing, eye was closed. If what the system said was true — as to me it now seemed to be true — that messages from the outside world acted on us as a driving-belt acts on a lathe, then it was quite logical to regard impressions as food.

So also was it reasonable to suppose that the sounder we were asleep, in the system's sense of that word, the fewer would be our impressions. Here, at any rate, was something which could be put to a practical test, and I did so by trying to self-remember as I walked the long length of Harley Street. After several tests of this kind I was convinced that the impressions which I received at moments of self-remembering were both more numerous and more vivid than those received at other times. There were many messages from the outside world which never reached my consciousness prior to my efforts to self-remember, and this was particularly true of noises. When I started to self-remember, a whole new world of sound came into being around me, a world from which I had previously been almost

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completely blanketed. I immediately became aware of the rumble of traffic, of the sound of my own footsteps, of the chatter of people as they passed me, of the shutting of doors and of the distant hooting of cars. It was true that I also saw things which I had not previously noticed, but the change from not-seeing to seeing was far less striking than was the change from not-hearing to hearing. These experiments convinced me that what Ouspensky had said was true and that a conscious effort made at the moment of receiving impressions greatly increased their vividness. There could be no doubt about it.

If impressions were food, as I was now prepared to accept them as being, then, just as there were such things as good meat and bad meat, so must there also be impressions which were fit for human consumption and impressions which were unfit for human consumption. And on what miserable impressions did some people, and particularly those people who lived in great cities, have to subsist, the impressions coming from gloomy alleys and from monotonous streets lined with melancholy houses, all slowly crumbling into decay, from gaunt blocks of offices which shut out the sky, and from factory chimneys billowing out smoke. Nowhere was there anything fresh from the hand of that sublime artist, Nature, nothing but the tawdry and uninspired works of sleeping man.

Yet drab though the impressions received from these industrial abominations might be, they were not necessarily poisonous to those who took them in, as some impressions undoubtedly were. I thought of the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's, of the canned delights of Hollywood and television, of the advertisements which faced one in the tube, and of the tragic headlines in the evening papers. What tainted stuff on which to nourish souls! And then the true significance of those words I must have uttered many times to patients became clear to me: 'What you need is a change of air.' It was not a change of air but a change of impressions that those poor starved patients needed. If

samples of the Shoreditch air on which they lived were to be analysed and compared with the air of Sandgate, to which they were going, little or no chemical difference would be found between them beyond, perhaps, a small preponderance of dust in the Shoreditch air. Nevertheless a fortnight at Sandgate would be of immense benefit to the patient. When we remain too long in the same surroundings the impressions we receive from them weaken and cease to nourish us, but if we are suddenly transported elsewhere, say from Shoreditch to Sandgate, then we see everything new and gleaming. We drink in the sea, the cliffs and the sky, we hear the hoarse protests of the gulls, as they swoop down over the harbour in search of offal, we sniff tar and seaweed in the air and, flooded with all these new and vivid impressions, we are revived. It was quite true, as a senior member of the group solemnly pointed out to me, that if we were less asleep we should be able to extract all the nourishment we needed in the way of impressions by gazing at a blot of ink on a piece of blotting-pad, but the fact was that we were *not* awake, and consequently we required the aid of periodic trips to places such as Sandgate. It was necessary to take our measure and to realize how little we could manage to do, and highly unprofitable to have an exaggerated opinion of our capacities.

Although nobody knowingly swallows bad food, but instead puts it aside, few of us see any need to reject bad impressions. Yet it is as important to protect ourselves from poisonous films, plays, books and pictures as it is to protect ourselves from consuming rotten food. Sometimes we are unable to avoid coming into contact with bad impressions, but it is possible, with a little practice, to refuse to become identified with them and, as it were, to step aside from them. So also can something be done to take in much more fully the impressions we receive. As has already been said, the intensity of impressions is increased by self-remembering, and so also can they be strengthened by receiving them as a child receives them, on essence. At this moment I am looking at

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the bookcase in front of me and I am receiving vivid impressions of bright colours coming from the covers, and particularly from a dust cover of royal blue. But immediately associative thought starts up in my mind in connection with this particular book — the name of the publisher, certain recollections of one of the directors of the firm — a dozen other cheap and futile thoughts have captured my attention, and lo! the bright colours in my bookshelf have faded and then disappeared altogether. I see everything now, not as a young child would see it, but as a jaded adult, 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought', is condemned to see it. It is as though a London fog had invaded my room and drained everything of its freshness.

The young child and the visionary alike see the world in pure, naked colour, unsullied by formatory centre's beiges and dull greys. 'Tiger tiger burning bright, in the watches of the night'; yes, not only pure yellow and black, but yellow lighted from within. Aldous Huxley has pointed out that 'preternatural light and colour are common to all visionary experience', and he illustrates this thesis with an extract from George Russell's *Candle of Vision*. The Irish poet writes of his own experience: 'I was sitting on the sea-shore, half listening to a friend arguing violently about something which bored me. Unconsciously to myself, I looked at a film of sand I had picked up on my hand, when I suddenly saw the exquisite beauty of every grain of it; instead of being dull I saw that each particle was made up on a perfect geometrical pattern, with sharp angles from each of which a brilliant shaft of light was reflected, while each tiny crystal shone like a rainbow. . . . Then suddenly, my consciousness was lighted up from within and I saw in a vivid way how the whole universe was made up of particles of material which, no matter how dull and lifeless they might seem, were nevertheless filled with intense and vital beauty. For a second or two the whole world appeared as a blaze of glory.'

It works both ways. Pierced suddenly by a shaft of beauty

a man may be startled momentarily out of sleep, or conversely, by means of self-remembering, the outer world gains light and colour. It is in fresh and vivid hues that an inspired artist often sees a commonplace object, and I no longer protest against the extravagances of our modern school of painters. Their pictures are often infantile and crude, but they are struggling to portray what they have actually seen when freed from the dark glasses of associative thinking.

Impressions from the outside world come to us dimmed and distorted by the obstructions they have encountered at the end of their journey. Something stands between them and us, and that something is a layer of fantasies and images in our minds, a layer which has to be pierced before the impressions can be registered by us. We deceive ourselves if we imagine that our minds are as open to impressions as the mind of a young child for always there is this entangling layer of noises and distractions. Only in dreamless sleep does the sequence of disorderly utterances and mumblings in this area of the mind cease so that the mind's whispering galleries are completely silent. This means that in our ordinary state we are never able to receive impressions in all their purity, but see things as people see them at dawn before the sun has had time to disperse the morning mists. 'If the doors of perception were cleansed' we should view things much more vividly and as they really are, or as Adam is supposed by Aldous Huxley to have seen them when on the morning of his creation he gazed at 'this miracle, moment by moment of naked existence'.

And if things were seen pure and uncontaminated with associative thoughts what a resounding *doh* 48 impression would strike in the inner chambers of our minds, a note which would pass without any difficulty to *mi* 12.

One of the reasons why this resounding *doh* 48 is so seldom struck in the West is our veritable fever for action, so that we are never willing to give ourselves up entirely to 'being', but instead are trying to do several things at the same time. We

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talk to ourselves or to somebody else as we are looking at a picture, and, when eating, we prop up a book on the table in order that we may read. Because of this desire for 'doing', our impressions seldom come to us pure and unsullied, but are usually jumbled and blurred. What we have to learn is not so much to 'do' but 'not to do', and Zen Buddhist books are full of admonitions about this need for 'being' rather than 'doing'. In *The Supreme Doctrine*, Hubert Benoit quotes the following conversation between a Zen Buddhist monk and his teacher:

A MONK: In order to work in the Tao is there a special way?

THE MASTER: Yes, there is one.

A MONK: Which is it?

THE MASTER: When one is hungry, he eats; when one is tired, he sleeps.

A MONK: That is what everybody does; is their way the same as yours?

THE MASTER: It is not the same.

A MONK: Why not?

THE MASTER: When they eat they do not only eat, they weave all sorts of imaginings. When they sleep they give rein to a thousand idle thoughts. That is why their way is not my way.

Ouspensky and Gurdjieff taught a similar lesson, and much more of our time in the earlier stages of the work was devoted to trying *not* to do something we usually did than to endeavouring to do anything new. That Gurdjieff had methods in common with those of the Zen Buddhist teacher is confirmed also by the following story told me long ago by Maurice Nicoll. Gurdjieff frequently made long journeys by car in France, stopping occasionally for refreshment in the open air, and Nicoll sometimes accompanied him on these journeys. Once, very late on a beautiful starlit night, they pulled up for a much-needed meal on a grass patch by the

side of the road, and Gurdjieff spread out the contents of the picnic-basket on the running-board of the car and invited Nicoll to sit down and eat with him. He did so, but as he ate he began to rhapsodize about the starlit dome over their heads. Gurdjieff took him very seriously to task. They were engaged, he said, in eating, and not in fabricating bad verse. There was a time for everything, and this was the moment for giving themselves up to the pleasures and impressions derived from eating.

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## CHAPTER X

### THE POSSIBILITY OF EVOLUTION IN MAN

At the following meeting Ouspensky reminded us of what he had previously said: that man fulfilled his duties as a transmitter of certain energies to the Earth as he was, and that there was no need for him to change. But a man might desire to change for his own private reasons. Indeed, very little purpose would be served by this intensive self-study of ours if at the end of it all there existed no possibility of our ever becoming other than we were. 'All along I have pointed out to you', Ouspensky continued, 'that one of the features which distinguishes G's psychology from all other Western systems of psychology is that it proclaims this possibility of effecting a radical change in man. By prolonged inner struggle and effort a man can become other than he was born.'

Ouspensky said that G had once pictured men as living in the basement of a house, quite unaware of the fact that there were much better rooms upstairs into which it was possible for them to gain an entry. But for this to happen several conditions had to be satisfied by the basement dwellers: first, that they should realize how and where they were living and that there existed much better rooms upstairs; second, that they obtained the help of someone who knew the way up to these more convenient premises; and third, that they were prepared to make the right kind of effort and for a very long period of time. Provided all these requirements were satisfied, change was possible.

From the earliest of times it had been claimed that there



existed three classical ways by which this kind of change could be brought about; the ways of the fakir, yogi and monk respectively. Each of these three paths to perfection was suited to the needs of a particular type of man: that of the fakir was appropriate for the man in whom moving centre predominated; that of the yogi met the requirements of the man of intellect; and that of the monk appealed to the emotional type of man. The fakir struggled with his body, and after enduring immense hardships he often succeeded in attaining will, but without having developed either his mind or his emotions. As a consequence of this he was capable of doing things, but did not know what to do. The way of the yogi was the way of knowledge, and here attention was directed chiefly to the development of mind and consciousness. In the religious way the emotions played a predominant part. The monk spent many difficult years struggling with his worldly desires, and he sometimes obtained mastery over them at last through his faith, sacrifice and devotion.

Ouspensky pointed out that all the classical paths to development demanded of those who trod them two things: complete obedience to authority and retirement from the world. Half-measures were often tried in the ways of the monk and the yogi but rarely with any real result. For any real change to occur the devotee must be prepared to abandon his family, his friends and his home, renounce all his possessions, and enter a yogi school or a monastery.

Ouspensky told us that after G had discussed the three classical methods of development with the members of his Moscow group, he had told them that there existed yet a fourth way which was sometimes called the way of the sly man. It had been given this name because those who followed it were in possession of certain knowledge which was unknown to the fakir, the yogi or the priest and which was of great profit to him. This fourth way had several advantages over the older traditional methods of development. One was

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that it did not require complete retirement from the world, and another that it substituted understanding for obedience to authority. Yet a third advantage attached to this method was that it worked on all three centres simultaneously, so that progress was likely to be more rapid than on the better-known ways of the yogi and the monk. Moreover, the teacher of this fourth method of development always took special note of the personal characteristics of his pupils, and this led to their being given much more individual attention.

Ouspensky now talked to us at the next few meetings about this fourth way, and one of the things he said about it was that it was a very difficult way to find. Schools of the fourth way appeared suddenly, carried on their work for a time and then disappeared, so that a man might regard himself as indeed fortunate if he managed to discover such a school and found himself in a position to profit from its existence. Although this was never directly claimed by Ouspensky, many of his followers assumed that the meetings we were attending were the preliminaries to the opening of a school of this kind in London.

Whether they were right in coming to this conclusion or not is immaterial. What was of importance to us was that we were working in accordance with school methods. In the first place, we were replacing obsolete and erroneous ideas in intellectual centre by ideas which we believed to be much nearer to the truth, and by doing this we were acquiring a great many new attitudes and points of view. We were also struggling with our identifications and negative emotions, and, finally, we were learning the complicated movements and Eastern dances taught by G at the Château in Fontainebleau. It must be borne in mind that G brought back from his extensive travels two things in addition to the system of ideas which we were now studying: namely, a number of complicated exercises and temple dances, and music which he had acquired from many different sources. He considered all three of these importations from the East as of importance

and worthy of study. Indeed, in most European circles Gurdjieff was regarded not so much as a philosopher, but as one of the greatest living experts on the sacred dances of the East. What may be of interest to many readers is that in a letter written by Madame Blavatsky to one of the early members of the Theosophical Society, she foretells that the next great teacher of Eastern ideas in Europe will be an instructor in Oriental dancing!

Long ago Ouspensky spoke to us of the Fourth Way he had pointed out, that when people speak of the further evolution of man they do so without ever stopping to define what they really mean by this. They have no idea of what a superman would be like, but project on to him the qualities which they happen to admire most: intellectual brilliance, creative genius, great sensitivity, courage or spirituality. In other words, they are quite unable to say precisely what line evolution would take in man. So also are people unable to say what they mean by the term 'a great man'.

G's system gives exact knowledge on both these subjects. It starts by stating that there are in all seven different categories of men, the first three including men on an ordinary human level, and the latter four categories being reserved for men who have reached a higher level than the ordinary one. In other words, men one, two and three are all men in whom no evolution at all has occurred, the only difference between them being with regard to the centre which is most active in them; man number one is a man in whom the moving centre predominates; man number two a man who is ruled by his emotional centre, and man number three a man in whom intellectual centre tends to prevail. Every man is born man one, two or three, but in some individuals the preponderance of one centre over the others is so slight that it is difficult to place them in their appropriate groups. Such people are well balanced, but the important thing to remember is that they all stand on the same level of being.

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two and three. They never occur naturally, but are always the products of special knowledge, inner work and struggle. Man number four will be described later, but man number five is a man who has attained unity, who is in possession of a permanent 'I', and who in consequence of this does not alter from hour to hour, or even from minute to minute, as we ordinary men and women do. In G's words, man number five is a man in whom 'crystallization' has taken place around some single motive, and because he is a man with a single permanent aim his knowledge partakes of this same uniform character also. Man number five possesses, in addition to this, true self-consciousness and the capacity to make use of one of the two higher centres; namely, his Higher Emotional Centre. Man number six has all the qualities of man number five and has attained a still higher level of consciousness, so that in him work not only Higher Emotional but also Higher Intellectual Centre. In consequence of this he is able to see not only himself but also the Universe objectively. Yet even a man so highly developed as this may lose all that he has gained, and it is only in man number seven, the highest level of being which man is capable of reaching, that knowledge and being are permanent and can never be lost. Man number seven was also described by G as being 'immortal within the limits of the solar system'. Man number four should be looked upon as being a man in a state of transition from the ground level of man number one, two or three, to the level of man number five. There is nothing at all permanent in him beyond his aim. He, like the higher categories of man, never occurs naturally but is always the product of special knowledge, conscious effort and inner struggle. Ouspensky said that it could be said of man number four that he was beginning to know himself and that his centres were more balanced and worked better than did the centres of men one, two and three. Another advantage enjoyed by man number four was that he had developed within him a fixed point or what Ouspensky called a

'permanent centre of gravity' to which everything was referred in him. He resembled, therefore, a man in possession of a reliable chart and compass, and this was a great boon to him, for even if he failed to do what he set out to do, he at any rate knew the direction in which he had to struggle.

Ouspensky added one more interesting detail to the above description of the seven different categories of men. He told us that G had said that it sometimes happened that a man skipped the transitional stage of man number four and crystallized out directly as man number five. Such a man had attained unity, but it might be a unity resting on an entirely unsatisfactory basis, and G had given as an example of this wrong form of crystallization the Caucasian brigands he had often watched in the mountains in his youth. These men could stand patiently behind a rock holding their rifles at the ready, tortured by flies and by the heat of the sun, for as much as eight hours at a stretch, without complaining. They could tolerate all sorts of discomforts and tortures, and had acquired great inner unity and strength, but all for no purpose other than that of brigandage. Wrong crystallizations of this kind have very tragic consequences.

After having discussed with us the various categories of men, Ouspensky repeated the statement he had so often made before — that a man's knowledge depended on his level of being. Consequently, the knowledge, art, science, philosophy and religion belonging to each of these different categories of men were knowledge, art, science, philosophy and religion of very different levels also. There was the religion and the art of man one, two or three, and the religion and the art of men five, six and seven, and in speaking, therefore, of such subjects as art, culture, knowledge and religion, it was always necessary first to state the level of the religion or of the art to which one was referring. This applied not only to any discussion about the different religions existing in the world but also to a discussion about a single religion, such as Christianity, for there were as many different levels of

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Christianity as there were different levels of men. On the ground level there was the purely imitative Christianity of man number one, the man dominated by his moving centre, the highly emotional and often fanatical Christianity of man number two and the intellectual Christianity of man number three, the kind of Christianity which was based on argument, dialectics and abstruse theological theories. There was also the Christianity of the saint, that is to say, of the man who had attained unity and had reached a higher level of being. A man such as the last named was capable of knowing and doing things far beyond the power of ordinary men to know and to do. The saint only had the ability to live in accordance with the exalted principles which Christ had laid down for the guidance of His small band of disciples, and it was absurd, therefore, to speak of Christianity as though there was only one form of Christianity, or of Christians as though they were all equally Christian.

Ouspensky again drew our attention to the fact that Christ spoke to His disciples quite differently from the way in which He spoke to the multitude. He also expected of them a much higher standard of understanding and conduct than could be demanded of the crowds who followed Him only for the sake of witnessing wonders or of being treated for their diseases. When on one occasion his disciples came to Christ after the multitude had left Him and asked Him why he had spoken to people only in parables, 'He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of heaven, but to them it is not given' (Matthew xiii, 11). And again: 'Unto you is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand' (Luke viii, 10).

Ouspensky said that there was yet another difference between ordinary men and more highly evolved men, or what G often called men 'in the true sense of that word'! In order to understand this difference it would be necessary to refer to the ancient doctrine of the four bodies of man.

The idea that man possessed four bodies was an ancient one common to many religions, and at one time it had been an important doctrine in both Christianity and Hinduism. The first of the four bodies was the ordinary physical body, known to the early Christians as the carnal body. The other three bodies were composed of finer and finer materials, each permeating the other in the way in which he had previously described the finer hydrogens as pervading the coarser ones. He reminded us of the important fact that, according to G's system, matter possessed cosmic and psychic attributes, and, this being so, these finer bodies had particular cosmic and psychic properties. The consciousness of each of the successive bodies was capable of controlling not only itself but also the coarser body in which it had been formed. In Christian terminology the names of these finer bodies were the *natural*, the *spiritual*, and, finest and highest of them all, the *divine* body. The Theosophists who had taken over the idea of the four bodies from an older Hindu teaching called them the *physical*, *astral*, *mental* and *causal* bodies.

'But', continued Ouspensky, 'there is an important difference between the teaching of the Theosophists and that of G on this subject of the four bodies. The Theosophists assume that man already possesses these finer bodies, whereas G states quite clearly that they exist only in more fully developed men, and all four of them only in man number seven. These finer bodies are quite unnecessary for ordinary living, and since we are able to discharge our cosmic functions without them, there is no need for anyone to acquire them. A man may even appear to be spiritually developed without them, for the finer materials out of which the higher bodies are made exist in him, although not yet organized into bodies. Outwardly the ordinary man and the more developed man appear to be the same, the difference between them showing itself in the fact that whereas the activities of the man in possession of four bodies are determined by his higher

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bodies, those of the ordinary man are determined by his physical body.'

Ouspensky then described how the higher bodies were formed in man. He began by explaining that in a state of waking-sleep — the state in which we lived — we expended so much of the finer hydrogens we produced on wrong activities, such as our various identifications, that insufficient were left over for the purposes even of right living, let alone for such non-essential work as the forming of higher bodies. But if a man worked on himself for a very long period of time, he might eventually accumulate sufficient of these higher materials, first to permit of his awakening himself from sleep, and then to lay down within his ordinary tissues the first of these finer bodies. If he continued to work in this way, the same process might be repeated. By saving and creating more and more of the finer hydrogens or energies in himself, he might store enough of them to allow of the formation within the second body of the third body, and eventually of the formation within that third body of the fourth body. Ouspensky said that in certain other Eastern teachings the first body was the 'carriage' (body), the second body was the 'horse' (emotions and desires), the third body the 'driver' (mind) and the fourth body the 'master' (consciousness, permanent 'I' and will) (see Fig. 7). 'But', he said in conclusion, 'the important thing to remember is that these finer bodies never occur naturally but are always the result of spiritual development. They, together with the inner psychological changes linked up with them, are the distinguishing mark of the more highly evolved man, man in the full sense of that word.'

Ouspensky then drew two diagrams on the blackboard, in order to illustrate the difference between the workings of an ordinary mechanical man and of a developed man possessed of all four bodies. Ordinary mechanical man was set in action by the impact of external influences on his physical body, which evoked in him various emotions — 'I



like', 'I dislike', 'I want', 'I don't want'. His thoughts were evoked by these various emotions, and 'will' was completely absent in him. All that he possessed in place of will was a number of desires of greater or lesser duration. If his desires

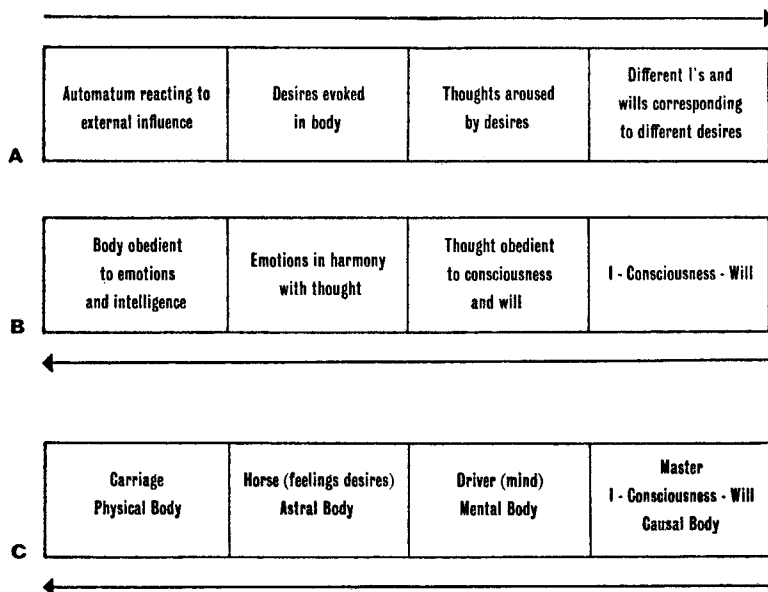


FIG. 7—A. This represents the functioning of ordinary mechanical man possessing a physical body only. All of his functions depend on external influences acting on his physical body. B. Represents the functioning of a developed man, possessing four bodies. In this case functions start from consciousness and will. C. The same idea of the functioning of developed man expressed in the Eastern parable of the master, driver, horse and carriage.

were of a more lasting character, he was regarded as a man of strong will, and if they were fleeting, he was considered to be a man of weak will. The controlling force of a man who was in possession of the three finer bodies moved in precisely the opposite direction. It originated in the fourth body, which possessed a permanent 'I', full consciousness and will. His thoughts obeyed the commands of his fourth body, and his

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desires were single and in harmony with his thoughts. Finally, his physical body was the obedient instrument of his thoughts and his emotions.

Ouspensky said that G made use of two parables for the purpose of showing the way in which the functions of the finer bodies worked in a fully developed man. The first of these two parables was the very ancient one of the carriage, horse, driver and master. The ordinary physical body was represented by the carriage, the second body was the horse (desires and emotions), the third body the driver (mind) and the fourth body the master (full consciousness and will). The master first gave instructions to the driver, the driver listened to these orders and drove the horse, and the horse pulled the carriage in the required direction.

The alternative parable to this was the story of the man living in the house of the four rooms. At first he inhabited the poorest of these rooms, and did not know until he was told about it that there were three additional rooms in the house filled with treasure. With the help of a teacher he eventually found the keys of these other rooms, but only when he had gained entry into the fourth and most important of these rooms did he become the real master of the house. Ouspensky said that all religious and other ways to perfection were concerned with the gaining of an entrance into this fourth room.

G had added that there existed certain artificial ways of gaining temporary admission into the fourth room. There were also entirely illegitimate methods of doing this which might lead to very bad results. What the man who contrived to get into the fourth room by such methods actually found when he got there varied in different cases, but he might well find that the room was devoid of all treasure.

Soon afterwards the meetings at Warwick Gardens were suspended for a week or two, and this gave me the opportunity to think over the question of man's evolution. What had the scientists to say on this important subject? So far as I

could find out, the majority of biologists and anthropologists believed that mechanical evolution, as described by Darwin, had come to an end in man and that he had attained by this means all that he could ever hope to get. When one looked at the evolutionary movement as a whole, one saw that it had worked by pressing life into what might be called the empty evolutionary spaces; that is to say, into those regions in which the various potentialities in the different tissues of an animal could be actualized. But, as Julian Huxley has pointed out, all evolutionary trends eventually reach their limits and become stabilized. Consequently, when the major groups of animals are examined, they are seen to radiate into a number of different but closely allied types which are all on the same evolutionary level. Very rarely does any group succeed in doing what man has achieved: namely, to break through the ceiling and thus attain a higher evolutionary level.

A break-through of this kind on to a higher plane happened when man attained the ability to speak, for this allowed him to hand down to his offspring inherited ideas, thus opening up to him an entirely new form of evolution. It is also possible that another break-through on to a higher level happened when Cro-Magnon man climbed up into an entirely strange world of aesthetic and religious values, some fifteen thousand years ago, for it was at about that time that man began to embark on activities which possessed no survival value at all, such as the ornamentation of his weapons, the decoration of his caves and the practice of ritual.

Is it possible that humanity is on the eve of yet another break-through on to a higher level, brought about this time by his own inner efforts and not by outer circumstances? This is a momentous question, but Lowes Dickinson seems to have had it in mind when he wrote the following: 'Man is in the making but henceforth he must make himself. To that point Nature has led him out of the primeval slime. She has given him limbs, she has given him a brain, she has given him

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the rudiments of a soul. Now it is for him to make or mar that splendid torso. Let him no more look to her for aid; for it is her will to create one who has the power to create himself.' (Lowes Dickinson, *A Modern Symposium*.)

Lowes Dickinson's words resemble those used by Ouspensky when he stressed to us that Nature did not require any further evolution of man and was even opposed to it. This being so, any further evolution would have to be a conscious evolution and consciousness could never evolve mechanically and unconsciously. Progress along this line would entail also the evolution of man's will, and will would never evolve involuntarily. As I usually did after I had studied the ideas of the system, I searched amongst my Indian books and in the Yajur Veda found the following reference to the evolution of man: 'I have arisen from the *earth* to the *mid-world*; I have arisen from the *mid-world* to *heaven*; from the level of the *firmament of heaven* I have gone to the *sun-world, the light*.' Sri Aurobindo comments on this pronouncement concerning the various stages of man's progression and states that the earth represents the world of 'matter', the low level from which man's body started, and that the mid-world represents man's attainment of the level of 'life'. By the firmament of heaven is meant the plane of 'pure mind', and by the level of the sun is meant the attainment of 'Supermind or Higher Consciousness'. And as I thought of these mysteries there came into my mind the words used by G many years previously when he had replied to a question asked by one of his Moscow group: 'In comparison with the intelligence of the Earth, the Sun's intelligence is divine.' I also recalled how angry Plotinus became with the Gnostics for denying the divinity of the sun and stars, which seemed to him far higher in the scale of being than human beings.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE STEP DIAGRAM AND THE ENNEAGRAM

OUSPENSKY returned many times to the Ray of Creation to reconsider it from some different viewpoint. On one occasion he said it provided us with a scale of consciousness and intelligence on which every grade of these qualities was marked, from the latent intelligence of metals up to the supreme intelligence of the Absolute. He reminded us that, according to G's system of thought, all forms of matter possessed psychic and cosmic as well as physical properties. The table of hydrogens which he had previously given us recorded, therefore, not only the densities and ratio of vibrations of different varieties of matter, but also their consciousness and their intelligence. The less dense the matter and the higher its rate of vibration, the more intelligent it was. Dead and unintelligent matter started only when vibrations ceased, and as we are not acquainted with this kind of vibrationless matter there was no need to talk about it.

He then turned to a consideration of those highly complex mixtures of hydrogens known as living creatures, and said that by determining the centre of gravity or the average hydrogen in each of them, we could also assess its intelligence.

At this point someone asked him for a definition of intelligence, and Ouspensky answered this question by defining intelligence in terms of adaptability. He said that the wooden table at which he was sitting had its own degree of intelligence in that it adjusted itself to a heavy weight placed on top of it by bending slightly. But if the weight were increased beyond a certain point the table would break, thus

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displaying the limits of its adaptability. It was quite incapable of making any adjustment at all to the lighting of a fire underneath it, but a cat had far more intelligence than the table because it would immediately remove itself from the proximity of the fire. A man was still more adaptable because he would not just remove himself, but would adopt measures to put the fire out, and thus save the room and the house from destruction.

If we confined our attention to the animals we could assess their intelligence by noting the number of stories they possessed. Ouspensky said that up till now we had studied only the structure of a man's machinery, and man was unique amongst all living things on the Earth in that he possessed three brains or stories, whereas other animals had only one or two. At this point Ouspensky drew on the blackboard a three-storied, a two-storied and a one-storied being and labelled them 'man', 'sheep' and 'worm' respectively. He said that when taken together man's middle and lower stories represented roughly the state of the sheep, and that his lowest story alone corresponded roughly with the state of the worm. 'This means', he continued, 'that in all of us there exists a sheep and a worm, and in some people the sheep is the more important of the two and in other people, the worm. Thus it is the worm which plays the chief determining role in number one (instinctive-moving) man, and the sheep which predominates in number two (emotional centre) man. In number three man, in whom intellectual centre takes the lead, "man" himself can be said to predominate, for he alone possesses an intellectual centre. But', added Ouspensky, 'this only applies to individual men and women, for the behaviour of mankind as a whole resembles that of the sheep being ruled chiefly by the middle story. The centre of gravity or average density of man's middle story is 96, so that this can be regarded as an index of his intelligence. If a man possessed in addition an astral body, his centre of gravity and his intelligence would be 48; if he possessed also a third

and fourth body, his intelligence would be 24 and 12 respectively.'

Ouspensky said that there was another way of classifying living creatures from the cosmic point of view. Scientists classified animals according to such characteristics as their skeletal structure, their teeth and their general formation, but there was a much more exact method of classifying everything and of determining precisely its relationship to the rest of the Universe. The criteria used in this cosmic method of classification were threefold, and depended first on the food which the animal ate, second on the kind of air it breathed and third on the medium in which it lived.

To illustrate this method of classification Ouspensky selected man and began by discussing his three kinds of food: ordinary food (H 768), air (192) and impressions (48).

It was quite impossible, he said, for a man to produce many more higher hydrogens and thereby to raise the level of his being by juggling with his diet, for if he did this to a marked extent he would die. The food taken in by the mouth and the air he breathed were fixed by his physiological needs, but he could change the quality of his impressions, and it was man's ability to do this which made evolution feasible for him. If, for example, he managed to exchange the dull impression, H 48, for the much finer impressions, H 24, H 12 and H 6, the higher output of the finer hydrogen required for his evolution would be brought about.

A greater change could be made in the diet of an animal with impunity. For example, a dog could live either on the food taken by man (H 768), or else on the hydrogens in the region of 1536, a diet on which a man would be unable to survive. A bee lived on a 'hydrogen' which was considerably higher than that used by man, but it also lived in an atmosphere within the hive in which a man would be unable to breathe. The flour-worm managed to live on rotten flour (H 1536) and it also breathed an atmosphere which was quite unsuited to the needs of man.

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At the next meeting Ouspensky gave us yet another method of classification which, he said, was based on the fact that the Universe was run on what G called the principle of reciprocal maintenance. No energy was ever wasted in the Universe, but when it had served its purpose in one sphere, it was utilized somewhere else. This cosmic principle of reciprocal maintenance was summed up in G's expression that everything in the Universe ate and in due course was eaten by everything else. He explained that in the diagram about to be put on the board, which was called both the 'step-diagram' and the 'diagram of everything living', the position of each entity in it was determined by what it ate and by what it was eaten by. The general principle underlying these 'eatings' was that a creature always fed on something which was lower than itself, and served as food for something which existed on a higher level than itself. Ouspensky then drew on the blackboard Figure 8.

'Each of these squares', he said, 'denotes a different level of being. The middle of the three numbers shows the average hydrogen of the creature itself, the lower number what it feeds on, and the higher number what it serves as food for.' Man in the seventh square from the bottom can be used as an illustration of this. According to the diagram, man's average hydrogen is 24, he sustains himself on hydrogen 96 and he himself serves as food for something with an average hydrogen 6. The square directly below that of man is occupied by the vertebrates with an average hydrogen 48, and the square below this contains the invertebrates with an average hydrogen 96. Consequently, in accordance with this step-diagram, man lives on invertebrates, the vertebrates live on plants and the invertebrates on minerals. Below minerals come the metals which constitute a separate cosmic group amongst the minerals. The lowermost square of all has no name because we never come across 'dead' matter of this kind on the earth's surface. At the bottom of this lowest square of all is placed the symbol of an inverted triangle, signifying 'nothing'.



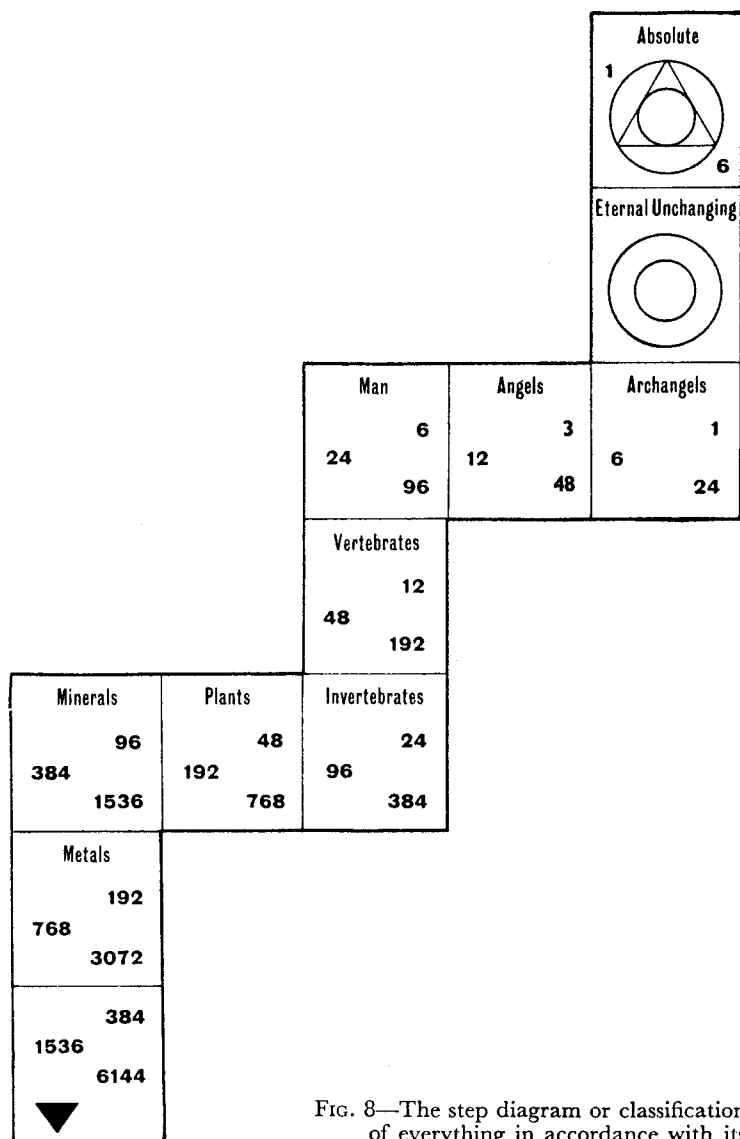


FIG. 8—The step diagram or classification of everything in accordance with its level of being.

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On the far side of man there is a square containing hydrogens 3, 12 and 48, and beyond this another square with hydrogens 1, 6 and 24. These squares represent higher entities than ourselves of which we have no knowledge at all, and we can call them angels and archangels if we like. The square above that of the archangels contains two concentric circles and is named the 'Eternal Unchanging'. Highest of all is the Absolute, marked with the usual symbol of a circle within a triangle.

'This diagram will seem very strange to you at first,' continued Ouspensky, 'and you may even think that it contradicts what you have learnt before. Its figures may seem to you to be at variance with those used in the three-storied factory, but don't bother at present about the actual figures. Be content to understand the general principles illustrated by these different diagrams, and later on we shall return to a further study of their figures.'

Actually Ouspensky never supplied us with any more information about the step-diagram, although he returned to it several times and appeared to be keenly interested in it himself. All that he added to his original account was the fact that he and some other members of the St. Petersburg group had agreed to equate 'angels' with 'planets' and 'archangels' with 'suns', on the grounds that the planets and the sun were the two worlds in the Ray of Creation just above the level of the Earth.

But was it any easier, I wondered, to visualize the invisible spheres of the planets and the sun, which represented their higher levels of being, than to visualize angels and archangels? I very much doubted it. It was not the planets we peered at through a telescope or the flaming orb we observed in the sky which lived on so much higher a level than did our Earth, but the invisible realms of the spirit of which they were symbols. Why, therefore, should not the angels and the archangels remain on the diagram?

This was a subject to which I subsequently gave some

thought and with regard to which I have reached certain conclusions. Consciousness and life are for me keys to the understanding of the great cosmic drama which is being played out there in that gigantic theatre of space and time, for without consciousness and life the play would be entirely meaningless. As Sir Robert Kolze has remarked in his book, *The Scheme of Things*: 'the majestic cavalcade of life ranging through the geologic ages for a thousand million years presents one feature of supreme importance.' This feature is the fact that consciousness has been climbing to higher and even higher levels *pari passu* with the evolution of the physical body it inhabits. The materialists regard this ascent of consciousness as the result of the evolution of more highly organized physical forms, but it is at least as likely that these physical forms are the *result*, as that they are the *cause*, of this ascent. And, for me, this is a much more probable explanation of what has been happening, for, as has already been pointed out, there would seem to be an urge towards this higher level, which is only another way of saying what G had said long previously, that there existed an evolutionary as well as an involutionary movement in the Ray of Creation. I agree, therefore, wholeheartedly with Sir Robert Kolze that the cosmic drama being played out there in space and time is the drama of the evolution of consciousness and of mind, and that the parallel evolution of higher physical forms which has accompanied it is a means towards that great end.

Having accepted consciousness and mind as the primary creative forces of the universe, I see no reason why they should not have produced conscious and intelligent beings as far above the level of man as man is above the level of the amoeba. For me it would be entirely ridiculous to imagine that the little biped creature living on this planet somewhere on the fringe of a well-nigh limitless universe marks the zenith of the achievements of Consciousness, and I no longer experience any difficulty therefore in accepting the two squares marked 'angels' and 'archangels' in G's step-

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diagram. Nor have I any wish to substitute other terms for these archaic words, hallowed by reverent use and time.

But what is the meaning of the expression 'being eaten by something on a higher level'? When food has been digested and absorbed it becomes part of another being, and thereby partakes of that being's nature. We were told both by Ouspensky and Gurdjieff that humanity as a whole provided food for the Moon, but we were also told that individual men and women had the chance of becoming part of something existing on a much higher level than themselves. It is along these lines that I interpret this strange idea of being eaten by higher beings.

G made great use of parables and symbols in his teaching and in his book *All and Everything*, and one evening Ouspensky spoke to us about the use of symbols in the transmission of esoteric knowledge. He began by saying that all our ordinary knowledge was based on observation followed by inference in the waking-sleep level of consciousness. Such knowledge was of a subjective nature and it regarded the world as split up into thousands and thousands of different phenomena. But on a higher plane of consciousness the onlooker was impressed not so much by the diversity of phenomena as by the unity of everything in the Universe, and it was exceedingly difficult to convey this idea of unity to people who had not experienced it themselves. The notion of a unity behind diversity could, of course, be put forward as an abstract idea, but because all language had been constructed in order to express what was seen in an ordinary state of consciousness, it was very difficult to make use of it for the entirely different purpose of expressing ideas on a higher level of consciousness. Realizing this, those who possessed objective knowledge often sought to convey it to others by means of myths and symbols.<sup>1</sup> Myths were part of the

<sup>1</sup> Plato maintained that religion must be mythological in its early stages and that education has to begin with inadequate symbols.

language of the Higher Emotional Centre, and symbols were made use of by the Higher Intellectual Centre.

But there were serious risks attached to attempts to transmit ideas in this way. In the hands of an incompetent person who saw only an outward form, a symbol became 'an instrument of delusion', for he was quite unable to realize that a symbol possessed many different aspects which had to be viewed simultaneously. So also were literally minded people able to see only the outer form of myths so that they completely missed what was of such great importance: their inner truths. The idea behind all sacred writing was to convey to the uninitiated person a higher meaning by way of myths and parables, a higher meaning which had to be seen and felt rather than thought out. Literal understanding is one thing, and inner and psychological understanding another, and there is very little real understanding of the parables and myths of sacred literature at the present time. This was because modern education encouraged people to look for logical definitions and arguments in connection with everything they see and hear, and, by directing attention entirely on to the outer form, the inner meaning is likely to be lost.

After discussing various symbols with us, Ouspensky drew on the blackboard an important diagram called the Enneagram which he said was peculiar to G's system of thought. When G had first given the Enneagram to his group, he said that many of the ideas he had previously given them could be found in other ancient systems of knowledge, although they were often badly arranged, so that the relationship between the different parts of the teaching was difficult to make out. But by putting the various parts of his own teaching on to the Enneagram they could always be viewed together as a single living whole. The Enneagram was therefore an important part of his teaching.

Ouspensky drew on the board a large circle and within it a triangle. The circumference of the circle was divided into nine equal parts, each part representing a note in an octave

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together with the two intervals. Ouspensky numbered the points marked off on the circumference of the circle 1 to 9, and placed the inner triangle so that it touched the circumference at the points 9, 3 and 6. By the side of the numbers on the circumference of the circle he wrote the notes of the tonic-solfa scale, the note *doh* coinciding with 9.

According to Ouspensky, everything in the system could be represented diagrammatically on the Enneagram so that it could be read there as clearly as if it had been written down in a book. But we must know how to read it, he added, and it would be true to say that it was only when we were able to put an idea into the Enneagram that we could be said to understand it. He told us that G had once said that a man who had the key to the reading of the Enneagram was possessed of a whole library, even though he were alone in the desert. All that he needed to do was to outline the symbol in the sand with his finger and to read in it the working of the great eternal laws of the Universe. Every time he returned to a further study of the diagram he had outlined he would discover in it something new. The Enneagram might be looked upon as being the fundamental hieroglyph of a universal language.

But the Enneagram was not complete until there were added to the circle and the contained triangle the lines uniting the points numbered 1, 4, 2, 8, 5, 7, 1 (see Fig. 9). Ouspensky explained the origin of this complicated inner figure by stating that the laws of unity were reflected in all phenomena, and that the decimal system was constructed on the basis of this law. 'Taking a unit', he writes, 'as one note containing within itself a whole octave, we must divide this unit into seven unequal parts in order to arrive at the seven notes of the octave. But in the graphic representation the inequality of the parts is not taken into account, and for the construction of the diagram there is taken a seventh part, then two-sevenths, then three-sevenths, four-sevenths,

five-sevenths, six-sevenths and seven-sevenths. Calculating these parts in decimals we get:

1/7	0·142857 . . .
2/7	0·285714 . . .
3/7	0·428571 . . .
4/7	0·571428 . . .
5/7	0·714285 . . .
6/7	0·857142 . . .
7/7	0·9 . . .

'In examining the series of periodic decimals so obtained we at once see that in all except the last the periods consist of exactly the same six digits, which run in a definite sequence, so that, knowing the first digit of the period, it is possible to reconstruct the whole period in full.' (P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*.)

If then we connect up the points in the circle in the above sequence, 1, 4, 2, 8, 5, 7, it gives us Figure 9 which represents the completed Enneagram. The numbers 3, 6 and 9 are not included in the sequence, for they form the triangle or triad of the symbol.

As previously said, the Enneagram can be used to represent all the ideas of the system, and Ouspensky used it on more than one occasion to represent the three octaves of the food diagram which he had previously given us. He started by taking the point 3 as representing the interval *mi-fa* in the first octave of food taken in by the mouth, the place where *doh* 192 of the second or air octave enters and assists *mi* 192 of this first octave to pass on to *fa* 96. But now a difficulty in the reading of the Enneagram occurs. It is obvious that the point 6 ought to represent the shock required at the second interval in the food octave, but it is equally obvious that it is in the wrong place. Instead of being situated correctly, between *si* 12 and the *doh* of the next octave, it is situated between *sol* 48 and *la* 24, where no interval exists. Ouspensky explained that the solution of this difficulty was that the



FIG. 9—The Enneagram, a circle with nine points, forming a triangle.

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point 3 marked the place where the second air octave began, and if we put this new octave into the diagram and examined it we should find that its first interval (between *mi* 48 and

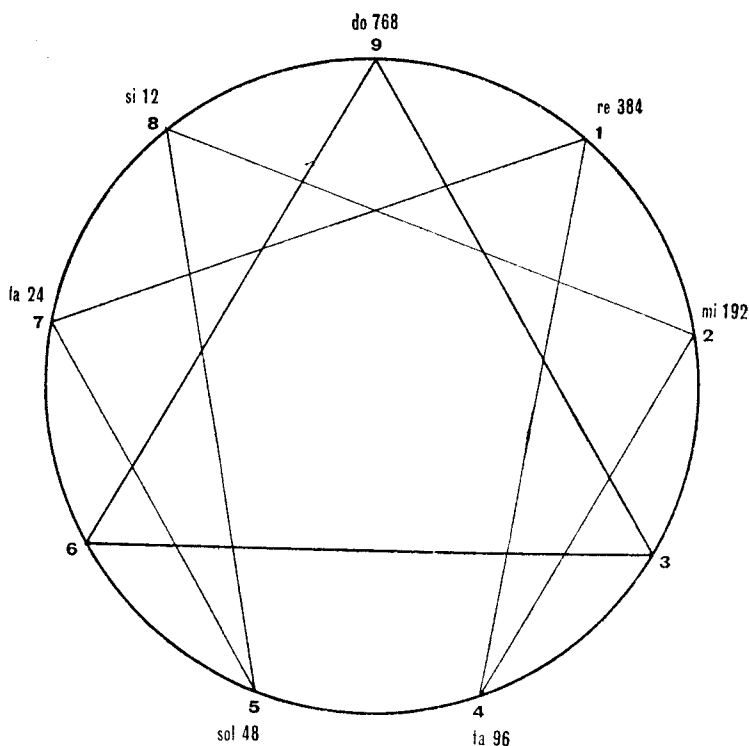


FIG. 9—The Enneagram. The Law of Seven is represented by the circumference of the circle and the Law of Three by the inner triangle.

*fa* 24) fell at 6, precisely where an additional shock was required. That shock was provided by the beginning of the third impressions octave, namely, *doh* 48.

When the three octaves of man's three kinds of food — ordinary food, air and impressions — are recorded on the Enneagram, it gives rise to Figure 10, and an examination



of this shows that any previous idea we may have had that the shocks imparted by the triangle representing the law of three were in the wrong places, was quite erroneous. The shocks are all correctly placed; point 3 is the point where the

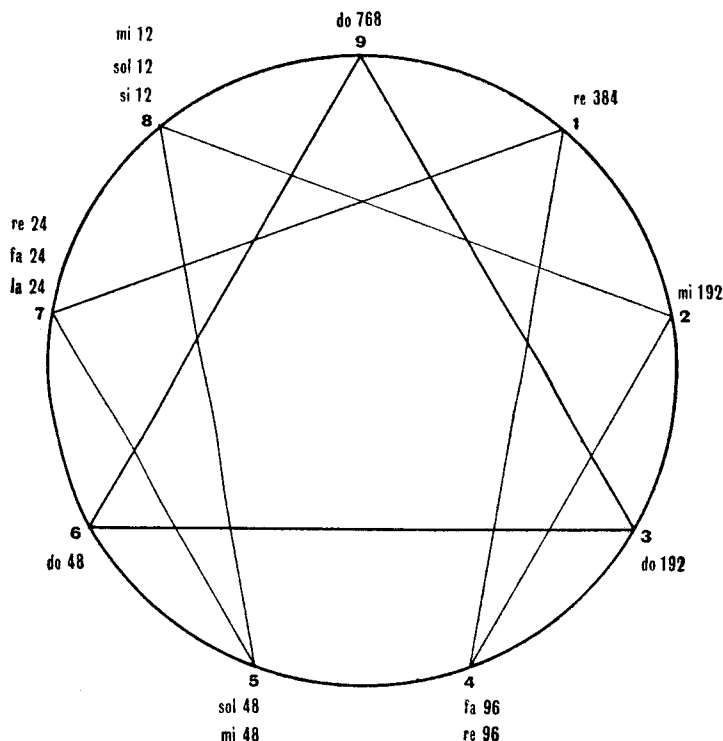


FIG. 10—The Enneagram used to represent the digestion of food in the former diagram of the three-storied factory. The air octave (192) enters at 3 and the impression octave (48) at 6.

shock required by the first, or ordinary, food octave enters; point 6 represents the entry of the shock required by the second, or air, octave and imparted to it by the third, or impressions, octave. When this impressions shock is provided, all three octaves progress as far as H 12 in the forms of *si* 12, *sol* 12 and *mi* 12, respectively. The first shock entering

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at 3 is provided by the air octave and it is entirely automatic. Because this shock is essential to life and because everything in the universe 'breathes', including even the earth, it is always imparted in this way.

As was previously stated in Chapter IX, two other shocks are possible in man, but they never occur mechanically and have to be specially created. G said that it would be possible to divide mankind into three categories of individuals, according to the number of shocks occurring in them; a man who experienced only the first mechanical shock (at 3) was one kind of man; a man who had two shocks at work in him (3 and 6) was another kind of man; a man who had all three shocks (3, 6 and 9) at work in him was a man in the fullest sense of that word; namely, man number 7.

Ouspensky helped us to reach a better understanding of the Enneagram by saying that it should never be looked upon as being static, but always in a state of movement. The Enneagram was a living and not a dead thing, an emblem of that perpetual motion which man had never been able to imitate in the many machines he had constructed. Ouspensky also said that in order to help his followers to get an inner feeling of the movement in the Enneagram — and only in this way could they understand it more fully — G had had a large Enneagram marked out on the floor of the hall of the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. The pupils who took part in the elaborate dances and movements performed in the evenings stood on the points in the circle marked 1 to 9, and were then instructed to move in accordance with the sequence 1, 4, 2, 8, 5, 7, turning round one another at the points of their meeting, that is to say, where the inner lines of the Enneagram crossed each other. By taking part in these movements the dancers learnt to experience the Enneagram as it really was, a diagram which represented the motions of life.

But what, it may be asked, is the significance of the inner movement in the Enneagram along the lines 1, 4, 2, 8, 5 and

7? The answer is that in the food diagram it represents the inner process by which denser matters are converted into finer matters, and also the mode of interaction of the three food octaves. It shows how the lower force, or denser matter, is raised to a higher level, but not to such a high level as that of the force or matter acting upon it. This is in accordance with the law of three, a law which enunciates that when an active force acts on a passive force, the result is the production of a third force which is intermediate between the two. Take as an example of this the right-hand area of the Enneagram marked with the numbers 384, 192 and 96. It will be seen that in the process of digestion the inner movement is from 384 to 96, and then back again to 192. Something goes forward and then travels in a reverse movement. In other words, behind the outer screen of appearances on the periphery of the circle, there is an inner movement at work which brings about the required changes.

Ouspensky was keenly interested in the Enneagram, and he put on to the circumference of the circle many different things, such as the digestive, respiratory and vascular systems of man, and even the different days of the week. He encouraged me to try to discover, with the help of the Enneagram, the inner movement behind these various physiological processes, and told me to pay special attention to the circulation of the blood. G had once said that there were seven different varieties of blood in the human body, so it seemed likely that these different kinds of blood provided the key to the understanding of this inner movement. But the division of activities in the body made by the physiologists did not always correspond with the division made by G, and although I could demonstrate on the Enneagram what I called the 'circulation of energies', I was unable to find in it the 'circulation of the blood'. Ouspensky advised me, therefore, not to be content with anything at present other than that which G had said could be represented on the Enneagram, the circulation of different kinds of blood.

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I was disposed to think that we were sometimes straining to fit phenomena on to the Enneagram, rather than trying to gain a deeper understanding of these phenomena with the Enneagram's help. Nevertheless, I regarded the Enneagram as being a far superior symbol of physiological processes than that so often used by the scientists, the machine. Looking at it for a moment or two was sufficient to produce in one the feeling that it was alive and in constant movement, sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating, but always in a state of flux. And flux is the very essence of life.

Many lessons can be derived from the Enneagram, and Maurice Nicoll has abstracted the following lesson from it. In his *Commentaries* he writes: 'The Enneagram depicts a series of transformations from lower to higher, from coarser to finer. Now in order that a lower may become transformed into a higher, it must be passive. That is, it must allow itself to be acted upon by a higher influence. How else could the food we eat become transformed and re-transformed into higher and higher substances, unless it submitted to the six stages of digestion. Digestion is transformation. Work is transformation. And if the higher influences of the work are to act on man, he must, in one sense, become passive to them and permit them to act on him. He can realize he cannot do, but he must realize also that Greater Mind exists, otherwise he will be in confusion. If he does not admit that anything bigger than he exists, he cannot be acted upon and so cannot evolve. But he must become passive — that is capable of *hearing* and then of accepting — he must not expect to get beyond his own stage to begin with. He cannot equal the work. . . . He cannot equal the forces that are transforming him. If you reflect, you will see that there must always be something higher than any man, whatever his stage, if evolution is possible, and so there must be a highest that is unattainable.'

## CHAPTER XII

### THE IDEA OF ESOTERICISM

For a long time the people attending Ouspensky's meetings in the Warwick Gardens room remained more or less the same. A new face appeared occasionally for a few meetings, and would then be seen no more. Nor was it surprising that there were so few newcomers, for we had been forbidden to speak to anybody about what we called 'the work'. We had even been asked to hide from our friends the fact that we were attending Ouspensky's meetings. But one evening, and quite unexpectedly, Ouspensky announced that he was now in a position to accept a limited number of new people, and that we had his permission to talk to those of our friends whom we thought might be suitable.

The question was immediately asked: 'How can we decide who is suitable and who is not suitable?' Ouspensky agreed that this was an exceedingly difficult matter to judge. He said that the St. Petersburg and Moscow groups had often expressed surprise at the lack of interest and understanding shown by their friends, when G had given them permission to speak to others of the ideas of the system. Some of those whom they had approached said that there was nothing at all new in the ideas, others replied that they were not particularly interested in what they had been told, and yet others gave it as their firm conviction that it was no good going to anybody else for a ready-made philosophy of life, but that it had to be found and worked out for oneself. And, having expressed this view, they dismissed the subject from their minds for good and went on living as they had done before, blindly and without thought. But sometimes, and

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often quite unexpectedly, friends who, at first, had been dismissed as unsuitable, had shown a very real interest in G's ideas and a keen desire to hear more. It was usually easier, Ouspensky said, to say who was unsuitable than to decide who was suitable. He warned us against regarding the psychological methods we were using as being in any way appropriate to the needs of people who required psychiatric help. 'The Fourth Way', he said, 'begins above the ordinary level of life. It is very difficult to follow and is highly unsuited to the needs of the sick. The methods we employ may even make psychiatric cases worse and it is of the greatest importance that you should realize that we are not a clinic for the treatment of the mentally unstable.'

The names of several well-known men were mentioned as suitable and highly desirable recruits, but Ouspensky smiled. 'They have too much personal luggage,' he said. 'Highly successful people usually think that they know everything already and are unwilling to consider the possibility that some of their ideas may be wrong and may have to be abandoned. Whenever people of this kind hear of the idea of inner growth or evolution, they visualize this growth as starting from where they are, which would, of course, mean that their personalities and all their inherent weaknesses would increase also with this growth. Such people do not realize the need for destroying anything in themselves as a preliminary to obtaining anything new. No, very successful people are usually too self-satisfied to be of any use to us. Perhaps the only quality which can be said to make a person suitable for the work is that he should already be a little disillusioned with ordinary life and, still more important, be a little disillusioned with himself. And, of course, it is essential that he should possess a Magnetic Centre.'

On being asked what this term, Magnetic Centre, meant, Ouspensky replied that having no will and being ruled by his personality rather than by essence, a modern Western man could be said to live almost entirely under the law of accident.

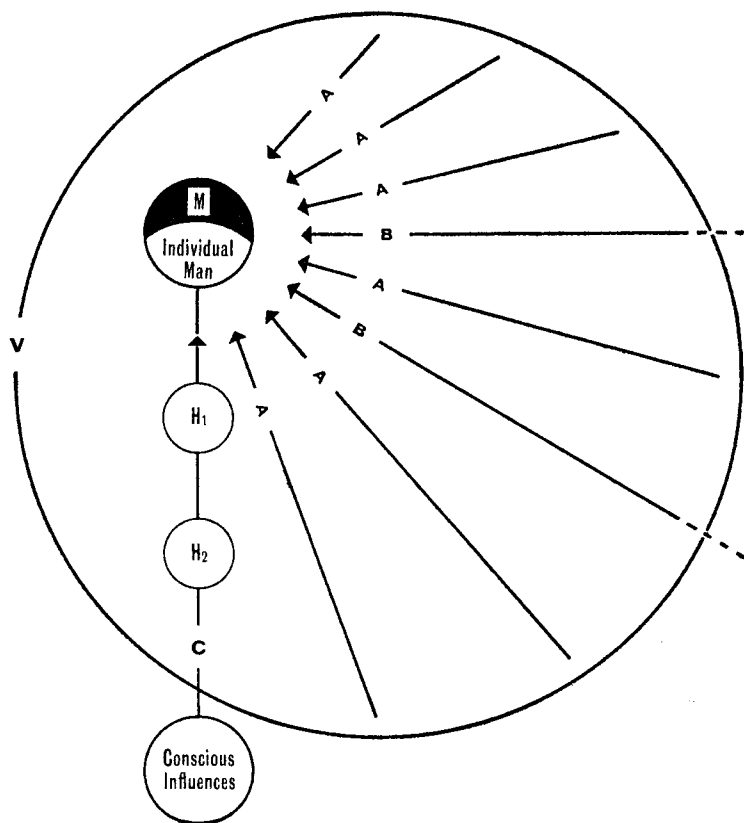


FIG. 11—Represents the various influences to which an individual man may be subjected, A, B and C. The dark crescent represents magnetic centre.

V = Life.

A = influences created in life itself.

B = influences created outside life but thrown into the general welter of life influences.

C = conscious influences originating in esoteric circles.

H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> = men connected indirectly with conscious influences.

He reacted automatically to whatever influences he happened to be exposed to, and since he had no say in what these influences were, it was accident which controlled his life. If the various influences to which a man responded were

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examined more carefully, they would be found to be of two kinds. Ouspensky then drew Figure 11 on the board and said that the first, and by far the commonest, kind of influences man encountered was created within and by life itself, and this he would call A influences. A influences included such accidental happenings as the country in which we happened to have been born, the family of which we were a member, our education, our social standing, the ideas and contemporary customs to which we were being constantly subjected, and finally the great political and national events in which we were engulfed, including the great accidents of war and peace. But we occasionally came across B influences, which were mixed up with the A influences, but which had originated outside the circle of ordinary life. The distinguishing feature of B influences was that they had come from a higher level and were conscious in origin. They had indeed been deliberately created by more highly evolved men, and had then been cast into the whirlpool of life in order that they might give guidance to the few people capable of recognizing their higher origin, and of understanding and utilizing them. B influences of this second kind were to be found incorporated in religious and philosophical teachings, and they were also occasionally met with in objective works of art and literature. Thrown thus into the maelstrom of ordinary life, B influences, like everything else in that whirlpool, were subject to the law of accident, so that it was entirely a matter of chance whether we met them or not and whether we recognized their true nature or not, profited by them or neglected them.

'Men differ', continued Ouspensky, 'with respect to their capacity to discriminate between these two kinds of influences, A and B.' One individual feels no difference in quality between them, whilst another senses a certain weight in B which does not exist in influences A. A man who is sensitive to this difference in quality between influences A and B is also a man who has come to the conclusion that it is



impossible to understand the Universe in terms of itself, that a great mystery lies behind not only the Universe but also behind his own existence on this earth. He may not be a religious man in the narrower sense in which that word is used, but he experiences moments of wonder and of an intuitive belief in the existence of something infinitely higher than himself. Influences B have a very definite effect on a man of this kind, and he puts them on one side and links them up with ideas of a similar nature which he has previously come across. In the course of time he acquires a small treasure-house of these B influences which stimulates the growth in him of a new faculty, to which G has given the name 'Magnetic Centre' (see Fig. 11). If this new function in him continues to obtain nourishment, and escapes neglect owing to the fierce competition of ordinary mechanical existence, it will impart a certain orientation to his thoughts and emotions so that he is always on the look-out for more knowledge of this kind. Eventually he may have the good fortune to come across a person who is in a position to give him help, say, by bringing him into contact with someone connected either directly or indirectly with conscious influences which are labelled C in the diagram. Or the connection he makes with conscious influences may be a less direct one than this, by way of several intermediaries. In any case, the man in question passes at this point, so far as his search for knowledge is concerned, outside the sphere of accident and comes within the range of conscious influences. This being so, he no longer depends for direction on his Magnetic Centre, for this has accomplished all that was required of it. Henceforth he will be dependent on guiding forces of a more conscious nature.

'According to G, Magnetic Centre begins to be formed — if it is formed at all — in the earlier years of life, and whether anyone has developed a Magnetic Centre or not will depend to a great extent on how he was brought up as a child. Because of the decline of religion and family life in the West,

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the growing child is likely to meet fewer and fewer B influences in his home, and this means that his emotional faculties and the higher parts of his nature will receive very little nourishment. Nor is this the only way in which the child suffers neglect during his earlier, formative years. A young child is far more sensitive to home atmosphere than many people realize, and instead of receiving *positive* teaching from the adults who surround him, he often receives from them only *negative* ideas, such as that nothing in the Universe has any real meaning, that man is a lone voyager in a waste of space, and that those who think otherwise than this are dreamers and impractical idealists. The brand of humanism advocated by many of our intellectuals provides very poor emotional nourishment for the growing child.

Ouspensky warned us that a Magnetic Centre was not necessarily an infallible guide to the truth and that it sometimes mistook an A influence for a B influence. Or a man might be led by an unreliable Magnetic Centre first in one direction and then in another, and in the end be so disheartened by his many mistakes and by his failure to find anything worthwhile that he adopted the only remedy available to the spiritually bankrupt person and became a cynic. In yet another person a Magnetic Centre might lack persistence and, although it possessed the capacity to discriminate between A and B influences, it might abandon the search for truth. Finally it had to be remembered that, although Magnetic Centre might be capable of bringing a man into contact with conscious influences, it could never ensure that he made good use of his opportunities.

After a man had established direct contact with knowledge from a higher level, he depended for further guidance on two things: his teacher and on his understanding of what his teacher told him. But he was now in a much stronger position than he had formerly been, and many ideas and feelings which previously had been vague and uncertain now became for him much more clearly defined. He also enjoyed the

immense advantage of knowing what kind of effort it was profitable for him to make and what efforts were useless. He could be sure also that, if he made the right kind of effort, he would in due course receive inner assurance that he was moving in the right direction. In other words, he would have pragmatic proof that his work was yielding positive results, however small these results might be.

At a later meeting, Ouspensky enlarged on a statement he had previously made, that the Fourth Way started on a higher level than that of ordinary life. He said that the moment when Magnetic Centre brought a man into contact with someone who actually knew the way was known as the *first threshold*, or step, in the way. From this threshold a stairway started which led upwards to a slightly higher level, and it was only by passing up this staircase that the traveller could enter the way itself. But to ascend the stairway he required the help of others. Ouspensky added that, whilst ascending the staircase, the man could be sure of nothing, and was sometimes consumed with doubts about the trustworthiness of his guide, the accuracy of the knowledge he was receiving, and finally about his own capacity to profit by it. But after he had passed the second threshold, at the top of the staircase, and was standing on the Way itself, his doubts disappeared. He knew now that he was facing in the right direction and that in time he might even become independent of his guide and know where he was going and how to get there. He was also a little less liable to lose all he had gained, and would find it more difficult to return to former ways of living and of thinking, should he decide to give up all further efforts.

Ouspensky more than once expressed the opinion that the new people who were coming into the work were less well prepared for it than their predecessors had been. He also declared that the men and women who had joined G in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the First World War were better material than we were, and he was even inclined

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to think that his later recruits in London were of a still lower standard than we were. This meant that more preliminary work had to be done on them and that they were more dependent on help in ascending the staircase which led to the Way.

These statements of Ouspensky gave rise to a discussion amongst ourselves as to why, at a time when such rapid advances were being made in all fields of knowledge, man possessed so little discrimination and understanding. For every invention of benefit to mankind, such as the many great discoveries in the field of medicine, there came an invention of a diabolical nature such as the atom bomb. Why was there all this confusion and lack of understanding amongst men? It was because knowledge and understanding were entirely different things. In order to understand something, the relationship between the part and the whole had to be seen, and the chief characteristic of modern research was that the whole was being broken down into such small pieces that their relationship to the whole was lost. Specialists spent their lives gazing at particles of information through their magnifying glasses without any hope of relating what they saw to the world in which they lived. It was not surprising that there existed an immense amount of information but very little understanding.

A question was asked at the next meeting about the source of B influences. We had been told that B influences were conscious in origin and that they had been thrown into life for a certain purpose. Who were the people responsible for this? It was obvious from his expression that Ouspensky welcomed this question.

'This brings us to the very important and much debated question of esotericism', he began, and then went on to explain that the humanity to which we belonged, and the humanity of which historians alone wrote, constituted the outermost of several circles of humanity, a circle which was often called the Circle of the Confusion of Tongues. The

eleventh chapter of Genesis opens with the words, 'And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech.' This statement corresponded with G's view that there had once been a time in the world's history when people were in direct touch with higher knowledge and lived under its influence. The chapter then continues thus: 'And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone and slime had they for mortar.' This account of a journey was interpreted symbolically by some authorities and, according to them, to journey from the East into a valley meant that the people who had formerly lived in accordance with esoteric principles now abandoned them and relied on their own much lower level of understanding. Then came the statement that they made bricks instead of stone and slime instead of mortar — in other words, they invented their own 'truths' and imagined they could 'do'. The final result of all this complete reliance on themselves and their own ideas was the building and the confusion of the Tower of Babel.

'But', continued Ouspensky, 'esoteric knowledge still managed to survive.' Within the great circle of the Confusion of Tongues, there still continued to exist three concentric circles of more highly evolved men. The *Esoteric* or innermost circle of all consisted of people who had attained the maximum development possible to man, full consciousness, unity and will (see Fig. 12). Men of this high level of development were quite incapable of performing actions contrary to their understanding, or having an understanding which could not be expressed also in action. Nor was it possible for there to be any misunderstanding between those who belonged to this circle, and this meant that all their actions were co-ordinated to a common aim. The next circle to this was the *Mesoteric* or Middle Circle, in which were found the same psychological qualities found in the innermost circle,

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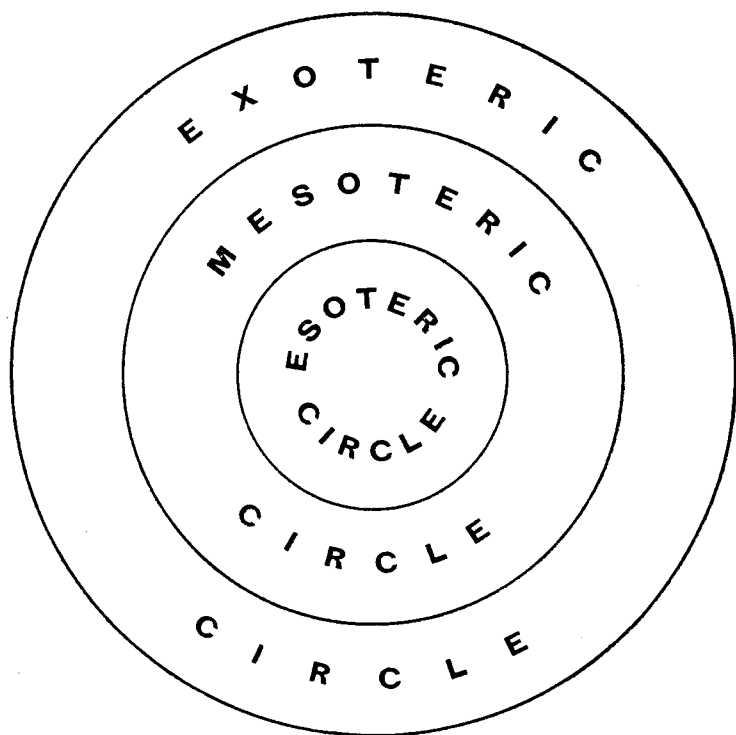
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the only difference between the two being that the knowledge of the Mesoteric Circle was of a more theoretical nature than that of the Esoteric Circle. The third circle was the *Exoteric*

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FIG. 12—The three esoteric circles of more highly developed humanity. Outside of these circles lie the region of the confusion of tongues.

circle. Those who belonged to it possessed most of the qualities of the inner two circles, but their knowledge was of a still more theoretical nature, so that it was often only philosophical. This difference in the quality of knowledge

could be expressed in the statement that, whereas a member of the Mesoteric Circle calculated, a member of the Exoteric Circle contemplated. This being so, the understanding of those belonging to Exoteric Circle could not always find an expression in action, as the understanding of the inner circles did. But it was impossible for there to be any misunderstanding between different individuals in this Exoteric Circle; what one understood, all the others understood in the same way. Beyond these concentric circles there lay the outer region of the Confusion of Tongues, the great area in which dwelt the whole of the rest of humanity.

There could never be, and never had been, any real understanding between individuals inhabiting this outer region. It was possible for a few people to agree about things of very little general importance to mankind, but even then only for a comparatively short time. In this outer circle everybody understood questions of importance to humanity in an entirely subjective way, and the only hope for those who dwelt in this land of the Confusion of Tongues was first that they should eventually realize the true state of affairs there, and second that they should seek the help of the Exoteric Circle. It was only in this manner that understanding could be reached. At this point Ouspensky rose from his chair, went over to the blackboard on which he had drawn the three inner circles, and made four gaps in the outermost Esoteric circle, which he said represented the entrances to the four different ways of development: the ways of the fakir, Yogi and monk and the Fourth Way.

I found it very difficult to picture to myself in terms of geography, history and everyday life, this nucleus of more highly evolved humanity which was supposed to have exerted so strong an influence on the past history of culture. How had these people managed to survive the upheavals of countless wars and revolutions? Did the men and women who formed this more conscious nucleus lead some form of community life, or did they and their disciples live in small

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groups in the remoter parts of Asia? The Theosophists believed in the existence of certain masters or *Rishis*, living in the remote fastnesses of the Himalayas, but I had never taken this idea of the *Rishis* seriously. But perhaps, after all, their belief in the existence of these great leaders was justified.

When Ouspensky was asked by a member of the group whether the highly evolved men he had spoken about still managed to survive, he replied that we had no reason to suppose that they had entirely disappeared. Pressed to give us some idea of the number of evolved men now in existence, he replied that this was an unanswerable question. 'But', he continued, 'there is an ancient tradition that a man who has managed to evolve is under the obligation of becoming the teacher to a hundred other people. So, even if we started with only seven number seven men, and each of these instructed a hundred disciples how to attain the level of man number six, and each of these in turn brought a hundred others up to the level of man number five, the output in more highly evolved men would still be very considerable.'

Diagrams can only represent a certain number of ideas and too much must not be expected of them. The figure showing the various circles of humanity is a good example of the limitations of diagrams. It shows a certain relationship between the various levels of humanity, but taken too literally it can easily become misleading. Culture does not spread by means of mass movements, but through the agency of individuals and of small groups of individuals. Mankind did not advance on a broad front through the palaeolithic, neolithic, bronze and iron ages, for examples of all of these epochs existed simultaneously in different parts of Europe. So also is it likely that more highly developed men live only in very small and scattered communities which maintain only a loose contact with each other. This at any rate is the impression which I have obtained from reading Gurdjieff's as yet unpublished book *Remarkable Men I Have Met*.

Ouspensky was particularly interested in this subject of



Esotericism and in the kindred subject of Esoteric Schools. In *A New Model of the Universe* he writes that these schools are hidden from the eyes of ordinary humanity, but that their influence persists uninterruptedly in history. Their aim, so far as we are able to understand it, is twofold: namely, to help races which have lapsed back into barbarism, and to produce teachers. According to tradition, the following historical personages came from esoteric schools: Moses, Gautama Buddha, John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, as well as the more mythical Orpheus, Hermes Trismegistus, Krishna and Rama. Ouspensky also includes in his list of school products the builders of the Pyramids and Sphinx, a few of the old alchemists, the priests of the Egyptian and Greek Mysteries, the architects of the Gothic Cathedrals built in the Middle Ages, and the founders of certain Orders of Sufis and Dervishes.

For me, the idea that esoteric schools and teachers had survived the violence and persecution of humanity, and had succeeded in passing on their knowledge by word of mouth over a period of several thousands of years, was a difficult one either to accept or to reject. One thing that could be said in its favour was that it explained what was otherwise extremely puzzling, the appearance at different times in history of teachers who have appeared suddenly upon the scene, imparted to a small following doctrines of an esoteric nature, and then either died or gone somewhere else, men such as Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana, Ammonius Saccas (the teacher of Plotinus) and St. Martin, '*le philosophe inconnu*'. To this list of teachers could be added a great many other names, including that of the man whose ideas are being studied in this book. Gurdjieff was no ordinary man, and it was impossible to be long in his presence without realizing this fact. But how and where had he acquired his knowledge and his being? In *Remarkable Men I Have Met* he describes monasteries in which he lived for many months in remote and inaccessible parts of Central Asia, and he writes also of

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ancient religious Brotherhoods, and of other ancient religious Orders; having met G and also read his book I am perhaps less sceptical than I formerly was of the existence of a small esoteric kernel of more highly evolved men.

During the later years of his teaching, Ouspensky returned repeatedly to the question which interested him so greatly, the existence somewhere of genuine esoteric schools. He pointed out, what is undoubtedly true, that a man is able to do very little by himself, since everything in life is so arranged as to make him forget his aim. But in a school he found himself living with people not of his own choosing, people with whom it might be very difficult for him to live and work. Tension was thereby created between himself and these others, so that he was continually being reminded of the need for him to struggle against his identifications and his negative emotions. Moreover, in a school he had the immense advantage of being under the constant supervision of a teacher who saw him more clearly than he saw himself.

Ouspensky said that work in a school took three forms: work on oneself, work with other people and work for the larger aim of the school. The Law of Seven made it necessary that these three lines of work should proceed simultaneously so that whenever one form of work slowed down at an interval it received a shock from the activity of the other two lines of work. For example, when work on oneself reached the interval *mi-fa*, an additional shock could be imparted to it by one or both of the other two lines of work becoming more active. On being asked what was meant by the third line of work or 'the larger aim', Ouspensky answered that this would gradually become apparent to the more senior members of the school, but that it was profitable for everybody to think about it from the very beginning. The teacher had a very definite aim in undertaking all the work he was doing, and it was for those who profited from his labours to study this aim and to help him in any way they could. As has previously been said, Ouspensky never claimed to have established a

school. All that he ever said on this subject was that it would be helpful to us to live as much as possible under school conditions and to make a special study of school methods. At first it was quite impossible to reproduce the necessary conditions in London, but in 1936 a large house and estate were purchased at Virginia Water, where many members of the group lived, and to which others came during the week-ends. This allowed us to observe ourselves living in unusual surroundings and when engaged in unfamiliar and, often, uncongenial tasks, and much new knowledge of ourselves was thereby obtained. We discovered, for example, how much we were the slaves of our bodies, and how essential it was for us to become less subservient to their demands. It was true that the living conditions at Virginia Water were much less rigorous than were those at G's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, but they were sufficiently difficult to allow of our observing ourselves in a number of trying circumstances, and in different stages of fatigue, hunger and irritation.

Ouspensky sometimes referred to a school in which he was very interested, a school which was formerly established in Coblenz during the summer and which moved to Italy for the winter months. It appeared to be only a school for painters, but he said that this was merely the façade behind which more important activities took place: namely, the study of ideas of an esoteric nature. He also said that there were reasons for believing that Ibsen and Alexis Tolstoy (the cousin of Leo, the writer) were members of this school, but that Ibsen had later withdrawn from it. In his play *The Master Builder* he gave his reasons for doing so. It will be recalled that the master builder explains to Elsa that he no longer wants to construct great cathedrals and to climb up dizzy heights, but intends to devote himself instead to the building of modest homes for ordinary men and women. And the reason for the master builder's abandonment of his former ideals was that he felt that it was his duty to look after his sick and disappointed wife.

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I am of the opinion that Ouspensky always hoped to make contact with a school, perhaps working somewhere in the Middle East, for so much had been destroyed in Europe by the War and by the Russian Revolution that it was unlikely that any esoteric school had managed to survive there. Ouspensky was deeply impressed by the Mevlivi dervishes when he visited their headquarters in Constantinople in the year 1908, and he hoped to return some day to renew his talks with their sheik, but soon after his visit Turkey had started to Westernize herself and in the process the Mevlivi dervishes were banished from Constantinople. That the idea of schools was constantly in Ouspensky's mind during the last ten years of his work in London is strongly suggested by a remark he made to me, shortly before the publication of his book, *A New Model of the Universe*. 'It will be very interesting', he said, with a studied calm which had an undertone of emotion, 'if through this book of mine we establish a link with other schools.' His hope was never realized.

## RELIGION

But the relationship between G's teaching to teachings of a frankly religious nature was so close that even when we were using system language our thoughts were often running in a religious direction. Whether we liked it or not, the psychological ideas of the system had revived in our minds memories of the sayings of Christ and of Buddha, and Madame Ouspensky increased this tendency of our thoughts to become deflected in a religious direction by organizing readings during the week-ends from the various sacred books of the world. For a month or so we would be listening at the country headquarters of 'the work' at Lyne to a translation she had had made from the *Philokalia*, that Russian collection of the writings of the early Christian fathers, and we would be astonished at the psychological insight shown by those early Christians into the various stages in the deepening of 'identification'. Then, as a relief from the austerities of the

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desert monks, we would be enjoying the sermons of the truly gentle and infinitely compassionate Gautama Buddha, and would be discovering how striking were the similarities between his words and the ideas we were studying during the rest of the week. Next might come readings from the fascinating collection of stories to be found in that work of Sufi genius, the *Mathnawi* of Jalala' uddin Rumi, stories which made us laugh at our own weaknesses, and which were almost identical with those displayed by the absurd characters portrayed in the book. Readings from Laotze and the Tao were also included in this symposium of Sunday readings, and more and more forcibly there was driven home for us the underlying unity of all the great World Faiths.

It was out of the readings of Gautama Buddha that there was born in me that interest which has increased in me ever since: my interest in the ancient traditional literature of India. The Vedas, the Upanishads and that sublime commentary on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, have become for me the greatest of the world's literary possessions, of equal standing to the Christian Gospels. And from this in turn has come the conviction that wherever we happen to be looking we are all searching for the same Eternal Truth, that Truth in the light of which all other forms of knowledge will fall into place and reveal their secrets to us. But what we usually fail to realize is that though the truth we are seeking is Eternal and Unchanging, it has to find expression in Time and through the medium of man's mind, and this in turn entails that it is expressed in many different ways. Consequently the world's sacred writings can be regarded as made up of two elements, the one Eternal and Unchanging and the other temporary, perishable and dependent on the period and the place in which the Eternal element is finding its expression. It is only the vehicle in which Truth is being presented which varies; the Eternal essence of the great religions is always the same.

Nor is it only the relationship between the various religions

which has been made clearer to me by G's teaching, but also the relationship existing between his teaching and that of the way of the monk. G has never revealed to any of us the source of his knowledge, but has spoken only rather vaguely of certain world brotherhoods and monasteries in the heart of Asia which he had visited in the company of others. He has also referred frequently to a band of 'seekers of the truth' which met again after their wanderings for the express purpose of putting together their findings in a form suitable for Western consumption. And what could be better fitted to the present needs of Western man, living as he now does in a scientific age, than the system of knowledge with which G returned after this meeting to Russia, and which he taught to his Moscow and St. Petersburg groups? It was a system particularly well suited to the needs of the present day. All dog-eared theological doctrines had been removed from it and it wore instead the reassuring trappings of materialism, but of a materialism which on closer examination proved to be utterly different from that of science. Another great advantage of the system was that it was so unlike institutional religion that not even the most rabid reactionary to orthodox religion could be offended by it, and yet from its depths came gleams of the same Eternal Truths which glow through the external trappings of religion. No better vehicle for the presentation of them to a religion-shy Western world could have been chosen than that which was devised by G and his fellow seekers.

I had never reacted strongly against orthodox Christianity, as some of my companions had done, but the terms used by religion had become so bedraggled and unsightly that I hesitated to make any further use of them. I uttered the word God on those very rare occasions or when it was necessary to use it, awkwardly and with overtones of apology, for it conjured up in my mind old Sunday-school pictures of an angry old Jewish sheik wearing a long beard similar to those worn by his myrmidons, Moses and his brother Aaron.

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Still worse has fared the word for that emotion which is the very life-blood of all the religions, the word love. 'Bawled from a million pulpits, lasciviously crooned through millions of loud-speakers, it has become an outrage to good taste and decent feeling'. I share Aldous Huxley's feelings about this mangled word love and for many years I have avoided using it. But here in G's system was a means of expressing ideas which I knew to be true without making use of these ill-treated words, and for me, therefore, G has acted not only as a fount of wisdom but as the means of bringing me back, after a long absence, to religion.

The conclusion which I had long ago reached that G was of a much more religious nature than Ouspensky was confirmed many years later when I met the former in Paris. It was true that G occasionally made disparaging remarks about priests, but when he did this he criticized the priests for their failings, and not for their calling. Of the great religious leaders themselves he spoke always with reverence, calling them the Divine Messengers of God. So also did he make freer use than Ouspensky had done of the concepts, practices and symbols of religion. 'There are two great errors', he said, 'in the popular view of religion. The first error is the failure of men to realize that a religion consists in "doing" and not in "thinking"'. A man must *live* his religion as fully as is within his power to live it, for otherwise his religion is only a fantasy or a philosophy. Whether we like it or not we reveal our religion by our actions and this is the only way in which we are able to reveal it. The second error lies in man's failure to understand that his religion will depend on his level of being and that the form of religion which suits him best is not necessarily the form most suited to the needs of another person.' Hence the complete failure of mankind to agree about the outward trappings of religion.

Two examples will be sufficient to show how G's teaching explained much in the gospels which had previously meant little or nothing to me, the first being the idea of death and



rebirth. A belief in the necessity for rebirth is common to all the great World Faiths, and it is the origin of the Indian term 'the twice born'. It is in the account of Nicodemus' secret visit to Christ that this subject is dealt with most clearly in the Gospels. Christ said to Nicodemus: 'Unless a man is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God', and Nicodemus, being a number three man who took everything literally, was amazed at such a statement. Not that Nicodemus is the only person who has found this saying a difficult one, for to understand what is meant by it the idea of rebirth has to be linked with two other ideas, those of 'awakening' and of 'dying to oneself'. Dr. Maurice Nicoll writes of these three closely allied ideas as follows: 'When a man awakes he can die; when he dies he can be born. . . . "To awake", "To die", "To be born": these are three successive stages. If you study the gospels attentively you will see that references are often made to the possibility of "being born"; several references are made to the necessity of "dying"; and there are very many references to the necessity of awakening' (Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, Vol. 1). To awake to oneself and to see the thousand petty identifications which enslave one is the first requirement; to die to this multitude of identifications and also to the many false 'I's created by the imagination is the second requirement; to be born again is the third, and, in the words of G's system being born again entails the growth of essence and the formation of a real and a permanent 'I'.

This doctrine of death and rebirth in a new form was part of a teaching which existed long before Christ's coming. There are good reasons for believing that the initiates at the Mystery ceremonies which were performed both at Eleusis and on the island of Philae in the river Nile, symbolized the ideas of death and rebirth by carrying in their hands grains of wheat. These seeds had to be cast on the ground, where, to all intents and purposes, they died as seeds before it was

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possible for them to be reborn into a new world in the new form of green and vigorous shoots.

The second religious subject on which G's teaching threw light for me was that of prayer. Before meeting the work, it seemed to me that prayer was little more than a petitioning of the Almighty for favours to which one was not in any wise entitled. It was therefore with particular interest that I awaited Ouspensky's answer to the question: 'Are prayers ever answered?' Instead of returning, as I had expected, a plain 'yes' or 'no', he replied: 'It depends on the prayer. G taught us that we must learn to pray just as we must learn to do everything else. Most prayers are merely requests that two and two shall make five instead of adding up, as usual, to four — in other words, that a man's actions shall not reap the customary result. But', Ouspensky added, 'whoever knows how to pray and to keep his attention on his prayer, that man has obtained what he has asked for.'

Maurice Nicoll helps us to understand the nature and the function of prayer from the point of view of G's teaching. In *The New Man* he writes that the gospels teach us that in the spiritual and invisible world there exist higher and lower levels which are distinct from one another and are arranged in an order of 'above' and 'below'. 'The lower is not in direct touch with the higher, as the ground floor is not in direct touch with the top floor. And so, to reach what is above, many difficulties stand in the way, which makes it look as if there were reluctance on the part of the higher level to respond to the lower. It is not a question of reluctance. . . . A man's prayer, his aim, his request must be persisted in; it must go on, in spite of not being answered. . . . As Christ says "he must pray continually and not faint". To pray — to enter into touch with a higher level — a man must know and feel he is nothing in comparison with what is above him.' Nicoll also makes an interesting comment on the very exact instructions given by Christ to His disciples on how to pray: 'But thou when thou prayest enter into thine inner chamber,

and having shut thy door pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee' (Matthew vi, 5, 6). According to Nicoll, 'to enter into thine inner chamber and shut the door' is to go into the innermost room of one's being and, having closed the door to all distractions, to pray from that small, innermost place in oneself which is the sole part of one capable of either communicating with something on a higher level or of receiving anything from it. The external, worldly side of a man, the pretending part of a man, the part which is usually present in him, is quite unable to pray.

But a theoretical difficulty stands in the way of receiving help from the highest level. In describing the Ray of Creation, Ouspensky pointed out that it was impossible for the Absolute to interfere with events happening on a lower level, without destroying all the machinery intervening between Itself and that lower level. How, therefore, can there be any direct response from above to a prayer coming from so far below as the Earth? This difficulty no longer troubles me, for I do not expect to establish contact, when I pray, with an Intelligence so exalted as that of the Supreme Being. Nor do I feel that this is in any way necessary to me. It is enough to know that in this Universe there exists a whole hierarchy of higher beings with whom it is occasionally possible to commune, and when this sublime event has taken place, when I have actually succeeded in drawing nearer to an intelligence on a higher level than myself, then my prayer has been answered.

G said that one must know how to pray, and Jacob Boehme tells us in *The Signature of All Things* how to approach prayer. His instructions are given in the form of a conversation between a disciple and his Master: 'Sir, how may I come to the supersensual life, so that I may see God and may hear God speaking?' inquires the disciple.

The Master answered and said: 'Son, when thou canst

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throw thyself into that where no creature dwelleth, though it be but for a moment, then thou hearest what God speaketh.'

DISCIPLE: 'Is that where no creature dwelleth near at hand; or is it afar off?'

MASTER: 'It is in thee. And if thou canst, my son, for a while but cease from all thy thinking and willing, then thou shalt hear the unspeakable words of God.'

DISCIPLE: 'How can I hear Him speak, when I stand still from thinking and willing?'

MASTER: 'When thou standest still from the thinking of self, and the willing of self; when both thy intellect and will are quiet and passive to the impression of the Eternal Word and Spirit; and when thy soul is winged up, and above that which is temporal, the outward senses, and the imagination being locked up by holy abstraction, then the eternal hearing, speaking and seeing will be revealed in thee.'

If any doubt lingers as to the necessity for stopping 'self-thinking and self-willing' when trying to pray, it will be dispelled by the support given to this by Meister Eckhart: 'The most powerful prayer, one well-nigh omnipotent and the worthiest work of all, is the outcome of a quiet mind. The quieter it is the more powerful, the worthier, the deeper, the more telling and more perfect the prayer is. To the quiet mind all things are possible. What is a quiet mind? A quiet mind is one which nothing weighs or worries, which, free from ties and all self-seeking, is wholly merged into the Will of God, and dead as to its own' (*The Works of Meister Eckhart*. Translated by C. de B. Evans).

G advances a novel and interesting religious idea in his book *All and Everything*, which can be called the theory of the Buried Conscience. He writes that at one time man was in direct communication with higher levels of thought and feeling thanks to his possession, at that time of a Real and

Objective Conscience, but that now he has lost touch with everything above him. His loss of contact with higher levels is in great part due to the fact that his Objective Conscience has become submerged in the subconscious regions of his mind, so that it no longer exerts any influence on his everyday life. As a substitute for his Buried Conscience he has developed an artificial and subjective conscience which has prescribed different codes of behaviour in different periods of history and in different parts of the world. But if man is to develop he must manage to awaken the Real Conscience which is asleep within him, and this awakening is very difficult and has to be done in stages. All work, including this awakening of Conscience, begins in Intellectual Centre with the acquirement of new attitudes and modes of thought, but the emotional part of Intellectual Centre is far too weak to be able to counteract the unruly Emotional Centre and it is doubtful whether this task of awakening Conscience could be achieved were it not for the fact that Real Conscience lies close to Higher Emotional Centre which now begins to lend it more powerful aid.

In speaking to his original Russian groups G once said that every real religion consisted of two parts. One part taught *what* had to be done. This part became common knowledge and in course of time was distorted and altered from its original form. The other part taught *how* to do what the first part laid down. This part was preserved in secret in special schools, and with its help it was always possible to rectify what had been distorted in the first part and to restore what had been forgotten. This secret part existed in Christianity as well as in other religions, and it taught us *how* to carry out the precepts of Christ and what they really meant.

From the above it is possible to gather what was G's own attitude to Christianity, and if any doubt still lingers on this subject it is dispelled by the answer he gave to someone who put the following question to him. 'What is the relationship

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of the teaching you are expounding to Christianity as we know it?' To this he replied: 'I do not know what you know about *Christianity*. It would be necessary to talk a great deal and for a long time in order to make clear what you understand by this term. But for the benefit of those who know already, I will say that, if you like, this is *Esoteric Christianity*.'

Some readers may resent the very idea that there exists such a thing as Esoteric Christianity. It has often been said that Christianity possesses no secrets at all and that its message is there for all humanity to accept or reject. I have even heard it said that the Gospels are simple books which are comprehensible to everybody. To those who think in this way, the idea that there once existed such things as the Christian Mysteries will be repellent, yet the term 'The Mysteries of Jesus' was a very familiar one to Christians living in the first two centuries. Many of the ceremonies and forms of worship used at that time in the Christian Church were ceremonies and rituals which had been taken over from what would now be called paganism. The early Christian Church was a great borrower, and Ancient Egypt contributed a great deal to its services. Religion in Egypt was always linked with the 'mysteries' and the idea that Christianity is a simple religion, comprehensible to the lowest level of intelligence, is a comparatively modern idea, an idea which was encouraged by the Protestants at the time of the Reformation. But the Early Christian Fathers held an entirely different view of Christianity. St. Clement of Alexandria had no doubts that there existed a hidden side of Christianity as well as the side which was open to the public, and he spoke with considerable heat on this subject. After referring to the Christian Mysteries, he said: 'Even now, I fear, as it is said, "to cast the pearls before swine", lest they tread them underfoot and turn and rend us. For it is difficult to exhibit the really pure and transparent words respecting the true light to swinish and untrained hearers.'

During 1949 readings of the manuscript of G's book *All and Everything* were held in his Paris flat, and some of us were told that special importance was laid by G on the chapters which described the mission of the Divine Messenger Ashieta Shiemash to the planet Earth. It was said, and I believe with truth, that G recognized a close relationship between the methods he was employing and those used by Ashieta Shiemash. In *All and Everything* G describes how before starting his mission to mankind Ashieta Shiemash meditated for forty days on the form which his message should take. In the end he decided that the inhabitants of the Earth so badly misunderstood now the real nature of Faith, Love and Hope — the three great principles which had been used by all former religious teachers — that it would be quite useless for him to employ them again. But fortunately something real and unspoilt still survived in man's unconscious, namely, the 'sacred being impulse Conscience', and it had remained intact, thanks to the very fact that it lay very deeply buried in man's unconscious, protected from wrong thinking and wrong feeling. It was therefore to man's Buried Conscience that Ashieta Shiemash made his appeal, with the result that in many of his hearers this sacred being impulse was awakened and began to participate in 'that consciousness of theirs by means of which their waking existence flows' (G. Gurdjieff, *All and Everything*).

Humanity is now in a critical situation with regard to religion. All religions are based on the belief that the individual is all important, but this doctrine is now being challenged by two giant World Powers who are asserting that the reverse of this is true and that the individual exists only for the sake of the community, as the ant exists only for the sake of the ant-heap and the bee only for the sake of the beehive. Here is a doctrine incompatible with all religious beliefs other than those of the pseudo-religion of communism which proclaims it, and it is a doctrine which is spreading at the moment when a great historian is assuring us that the outlook

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for the Western Powers is poor unless there be a spiritual revival. According to Arnold Toynbee, this alone is capable of resolving our difficulties and of uniting the nations of the world. Now, if we agree with this historian's verdict we must also agree with him that it is highly unlikely that the world will ever be conquered and united under any one of the great religious faiths, whether that faith be Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. This hope, once widely held by Christians and by Moslems, has now to be abandoned.

But this does not preclude the possibility of a religious resurgence of another kind, for religions, in the wider sense in which Arnold Toynbee is using that word, can take many forms, and it would be a mistake to regard a spread of one of the old world faiths as the only possible remedy for our present ills. G taught that there are several roads to human evolution. There are men for whom the way of the monk would appear to be an unsuitable path to perfection, a possibility which has been more widely recognized in the East than in the West. It is for this reason that different kinds of yoga have been provided for different types of men; for the religious type Bhakti-yoga; Jnana-yoga or the yoga of knowledge for the philosophical type of man; Karma yoga for the active type; and Rajah-yoga for the contemplative type. All of these are recognized as ways to perfection, and in the Bhagavad Gita Krishna promises that whatever the way chosen, provided it be pursued with devotion and sincerity, it will lead in the end to the same goal. 'If you cannot become absorbed in me, then devote yourself to works which will please me. For by working for my sake only you will achieve perfection. If you cannot even do this, then surrender yourself to me altogether. Control the lusts of your heart and renounce the fruits of every action.' In this manner does Krishna counsel Arjuna.

It will have been noted that there exist elements from all of these different kinds of yoga in the method of development described in this book, and the emphasis, placed on each



of these elements, will vary in accordance with the type of the person concerned. No reader approaches this, or any other book, with an open mind, but with a mind which has previously been subjected to many years of conditioning. His reaction to Gurdjieff's teaching will depend, therefore, not on the impressions of the moment but on a host of factors in his past conditioning. It will depend, amongst other things, on his nationality, on whether he be a Westerner or an Oriental, on his education, on his upbringing and on a thousand and one influences to which he has previously been exposed. How can a mind which has undergone so much previous conditioning look upon anything afresh and without bias? It is obviously impossible for any of us to view what we read otherwise than through a medium of past beliefs, ideals and experiences.

Nor can an intellectual acceptance of certain new ideals, however noble they be, have any radical or lasting effect on a person. Ideals exist only in the mind, and to add a few new ones to those we have already collected is only to continue the line of our thinking from the past into the future. All that is really happening is that a new suit of clothes is being put on to the wearer of the same old body and of the same old face. To bring about any radical and lasting change in ourselves, something far more revolutionary is required than these surface additions. We are imprisoned within our own minds, and however far we extend them and however highly we decorate them we still remain within their walls. If we are ever to escape from our prisons, the first step must be that we should realize our true situation and at the same time see ourselves as we really are and not as we imagine ourselves to be. This can be done by holding ourselves in a state of passive awareness, a state in which the limitation of the mind and of the imprisoned self are both seen and felt to the fullest. But here, at this point, we have to be on our guard. When, probably for the first time in our lives, we catch sight of our own pettiness, our vanity, our egoism,

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our indifference to others and our greed, we rush forward to explain, to judge, to condemn, or to excuse the things which have been exposed, and thus we become immediately identified with them. Such mechanical reactions as these must be quietly but firmly pushed aside, for it is only when we have ceased either to condemn or to justify, and are able to accept as ourselves all we have seen — it is only then that something on a higher level may appear. If we can manage to acknowledge ourselves in our entirety without any comment and without even naming what has been seen, then an unaccustomed stillness may descend on us, in which the narrow self of everyday life is completely transcended and the walls of our prison disappear. It is at this moment of inner quietness, of newly revealed freedom, of heightened being, that something of a much more real nature makes its presence felt. Perhaps we have been seeking truth all our lives, or else asking to be led to it by some teacher whom we believe to know more than we do, but we have never succeeded in finding what we sought. And now at this quiet moment, because we are ready for truth, and have transcended that which has hitherto stood between truth and us — truth comes to us uninvited, conferring on us also happiness with its magic touch.

It is one thing to meditate in the heart of a wood or alone in one's room, but experience shows that it is quite another thing to maintain this state of tranquil alertness in the company of one's fellow beings, and it is this that the teachers of the Fourth Way demand of its followers. Those who pursue this path are not monks or anchorites who have turned their backs on the world, but are quite ordinary men and women who are using in a special way the raw material of life. It is not under the Bodhi tree but in the mirror of our relationships with people, animals, property and ideas, that we ordinary people are best able to catch sight of ourselves most clearly. This is difficult work on which those who follow Gurdjieff's teaching are engaged, but it is essential to the

attainment of self-knowledge, and if there be more wisdom in any one saying than in another, it lies surely in that old command: *Know thyself*. It was with words of this kind that this study of Gurdjieff's teaching began, and it is with the same words that it ends.

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#### CHAPTER XIV

### SAYINGS OF GURDJIEFF

GURDJIEFF had the capacity to convey so much in some forceful saying that his words echoed for a long time in the hearers' minds. His maxims did not usually take the form of polished aphorisms for, although he was acquainted with many different tongues, he was a master of none of them, and was inclined to poke fun at what he called the 'bon ton literary language'. Indeed, some of his phrases were memorable chiefly because of their colloquial character, such as that saying of his which Ouspensky so often quoted: 'To know everything it is necessary to know only a very little but to know that very little is to know pretty much.' A great deal of the force in G's maxims was imparted by the man who uttered them, and this force is absent from the written word. Yet despite the weakening which his sayings will undergo in print, I have felt it worth while recording some of them in this final chapter.

If it were possible for me to introduce them with a short and telling description of the man who uttered them and whose presence made such a strong impact — not necessarily favourable — on everybody who came into contact with him, I would do so, but I have never read any successful description of him. I shall not attempt, therefore, to make a thumbnail drawing of a man so difficult to portray as George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. His maxims must stand by themselves.

*Aphorisms from the Study House of the Château du Prieuré at  
Fontainebleau in which Gurdjieff established his Institute  
for the Harmonious Development of Man*

## 1.

It is better to be temporarily selfish than never to be just.  
Only *conscious* suffering is of value.

Man is given a limited quantity of experiences; being  
economical with them lengthens his life.

## 2.

Know that this house is of value only to those who have  
recognized their nothingness and believe it is possible to  
alter.

Here we can only direct and create conditions, but not  
help.

Remember that here work is not done for work's sake, but  
as a means.

Like what *it* does not like.

## 3.

Conscious love evokes the same in response.

Emotional love evokes the opposite.

Physical love depends on type and polarity.

Faith of consciousness is freedom.

Faith of feeling is slavery.

Faith of body is stupidity.

Hope of consciousness is strength.

Hope of feeling is cowardice.

Hope of body is disease.

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## 4.

Only he can be impartial who is able to put himself into the position of others.

We can only strive to be able to be Christians.

I love him who loves work.

Judge others according to yourself and you will seldom be mistaken.

## 5.

Consider what others think of you, not what they say.

If you are not critical by nature, it is useless for you to remain here.

He who has got rid of the disease 'Tomorrow' has the possibility to attain what he is here for.

## 6.

If you already know what is wrong and do it, you commit a sin that is difficult to redress.

The chief means of happiness in this life is the ability to consider outwardly always, inwardly never.

## 7.

One of the strongest motives for the wish to work on yourself is the realization that you may die at any moment — only you must first realize this.

Man is refreshed not by the quantity but by the quality of sleep — sleep little without regret.

## 8.

The highest that a man can attain is to be able to *do*.

## 9.

Here there are neither English nor Russians, Jews nor Christians, but only those following one aim, to be able to be.

## 10.

Take the understanding of the East and the knowledge of the West and then seek.

Only he who can take care of the property of others can have his own.

## 11.

Remember yourself always and everywhere.

## 12.

A good man loves his father and mother.  
 Help him only who strives not to be an idler.  
 Love not art with your feelings.  
 Respect all religions.  
 Judge no one according to the tales of others.

## 13.

Blessed is he who hath a soul,  
 Blessed is he who hath none,  
 Woe and sorrow to him who hath it in conception.

## 14.

The worse the conditions of life, the greater the possibility for productive work, provided you work consciously.

The energy expended in active inner work is immediately transformed into new energy; that expended in passive work is lost forever.

Practise love on animals first; they react better and more sensitively.

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*I add some additional sayings of Gurdjieff's, most of which have been abstracted from accounts of meetings taken by him in London and America during the years 1921-24*

There is only one kind of magic and this is 'doing'.

All energy spent on conscious work is an investment; that spent mechanically is lost for ever.

We must destroy our buffers. Children have none; therefore we must become like little children.

We attract forces according to our being.

Humanity is the earth's nerve-endings through which planetary vibrations are received for transmission.

Everything in the universe has a place in a scale.

No energy is ever lost in the cosmic scheme.

One twentieth of all our energy goes to emotional and instinctive centres. Self-remembering is a lamp which must be kept alight by energy from these two centres. Our thinking centre is not really a centre, but an apparatus for collecting impressions.

Formatory apparatus resembles a hired typist who works for a firm and has a large number of stereotyped replies for external impressions. She sends printed replies to other centres who are the 'directors' of the firm and who are strangers to each other. Wrong replies are often sent, as the typist is asleep or lazy.

In deep sleep all communication between centres is closed. Our sleep is bad because we do not cut off lines of communication.



We have good and bad angels. The good angels work by way of our voluntary, active nature and the bad through our passive nature.

Mr. Self-love and Madame Vanity are the two chief agents of the devil.

Do not be affected by externals. In themselves they are harmless; it is we who allow ourselves to be hurt by them.

We never reach the limits of our strength.

If we do what we like doing, we are immediately rewarded by the pleasure of doing it. If we do what we don't like doing the reward must come later. It is a mathematical law and all life is mathematics.

Man is a symbol of the laws of creation; in him there is evolution, involution, struggle, progress and retrogression, struggle between positive and negative, active and passive, yes and no, good and evil.

Men have their minds and women their feelings more highly developed. Either alone can give nothing. Think what you feel and feel what you think. Fusion of the two produces another force.

For some people religion is useful but for others it is only a policeman.

We are sheep kept to provide wool for our masters who feed us and keep us as slaves of illusion. But we have a chance of escape and our masters are anxious to help us, but we like being sheep. It is comfortable.

He who can love can *be*; he who can *be* can *do*; he who can do *is*.

Sincerity is the key to self-knowledge and to be sincere with oneself brings great suffering.

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Sleep is very comfortable, but waking is very bitter.

Free will is the function of the Master within us. Our 'will' is the supremacy of one desire over another.

Eastern art has a mathematical basis. It is a script with an inner and an outer content. In Persia there is a room in a monastery which makes one weep owing to mathematical combinations of different parts of its architecture. Real art is knowledge and not talent.

An ordinary man has no 'Master'. He is ruled now by the mind, now by the feelings and now by the body. Often the order comes from the automatic apparatus and still more often he is ordered about by the sex centre. Real will can only be when one 'I' rules, when there is a 'master' in the house.

Morality is a stick with two ends; it can be turned this way and that.

From the time when man began to live on the Earth, from the time of Adam onwards, there started to be formed within him, with the help of God, of Nature, and of all his surroundings, an organ whose function is conscience. Every man has this organ, and whoever is guided by it automatically lives according to God's commandments. If our consciences were clear, and not buried, there would be no need to speak about morality, for consciously or unconsciously everyone would behave according to God's commandments. Unfortunately conscience is covered up with a kind of crust which can be pierced only by intense suffering; then conscience speaks. But after a while a man calms down and once more the organ becomes covered over and buried.

You should forget about morality. Conversations about morality are simply empty talk. Your aim is *inner morality*.

External morality is different everywhere.

You should understand, and establish it as a firm rule, not to pay attention to other people's opinions. You must be free of people surrounding you, and when you are free inside you will be free of them.

To be just at the moment of action is a hundred times more valuable than to be just afterwards.

To gain anything real, long practice is necessary. Try to accomplish very small things first.

There are two kinds of doing — automatic and doing what you 'wish'. Take a small thing which you 'wish' to do and cannot do and make this your God. Let nothing interfere. If you 'wish', you can. Without wishing you never 'can'. 'Wish' is the most powerful thing in the world.

To bear the manifestation of others is a big thing. The last thing for a man.

In the river of life suffering is not intentional. In conscious life suffering is intentional and of great value.

To love one must first forget all about love. Make it your aim and look for direction. As we are we cannot possibly love.

Until a man uncovers himself he cannot see.

Aurobind

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